

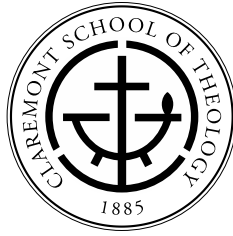
FISHING FOR THE HEART IN THE OCEAN OF THE UNKNOWN:
A STUDY OF THE IFS MODEL AS A FOUNDATIONAL CONCEPT OF
INNER-SELF CONTEXTUALIZATION FOR DIASPORIC TONGANS

A Dissertation
presented to
the Faculty of
Claremont School of Theology

In Partial Fulfillment
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Doctor of Philosophy

by
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This Dissertation, completed by

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Abstract

Fishing for the Heart in the Ocean of the Unknown: A Study of the IFS Model as a Foundational Concept of Inner-Self Contextualization for Diasporic Tongans

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When Christianity was brought to Tonga by Western missionaries, Tongans contextualized Christian teachings using their culture and understandings. They also integrated Tongan practices with Christian ones. Now, many Tongans live outside Tonga. There is a gap between their beliefs and understandings of Jesus in their culture and how other cultures understand and believe in Jesus. Thus, Tongans need to engage in inner-self contextualization.

This dissertation investigates the issues of Tongan people in the United States related to connecting their traditions and culture with those of the people living in the regions they now occupy. Specifically, it assesses and evaluates current issues in Tongan churches in the United States and in Tonga that remain unresolved in the Tongan community. Emphasis is placed on the generational gap between first-generation and second-generation Tongan Americans and problems involving the youth within the Tongan community. This study offers context for what is currently taking place before proposing ways to bridge the gap between Tongans' cultural values and the contexts in which they live. To help bridge this gap, alternatives for understanding and interpreting Tongan traditions are provided. The Internal Family Systems model is proposed as a way to help Tongans engage in inner-self contextualization while living in the United States or other places outside of Tonga. In addition, suggestions are made for improving theological education and leadership development for Tongan ministers.

This work is dedicated to my Wife and Best Friend, Mele Tangikina Sekeni,
who stood by my side, day and night, for better and for worse, in sickness and in health,
while fighting for her life after being diagnosed with cancer.

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List of Abbreviations

CST	Claremont School of Theology
FWCT	Free Wesleyan Church of Tonga
IFS	Internal Family Systems
PISA	Pacific Islanders' Student Association
PT	Practical theology
STC	Sia'atoutai Theological College

Introduction

Statement of the Problem and the Thesis

Tongan people hold their understanding and embodiment of the core values behind their culture in their hearts. Their loving and respectful nature is engrained in their culture. Over the years, this Tongan nature and these values have been lost due to social and political developments. Tongans are surrounded by new lifestyles influenced by the cultures of surrounding countries. The origin of their cultural values is slowly fading away, while foreign cultures continue to integrate with Tongan culture, and this has resulted in new meanings, interpretations, and misunderstandings. Behind every Tongan cultural value there are messages from our ancestors, and it is important that these continue to be passed on to the people of Tonga, so that historical traditions and culture remain important and intact. We cannot continue to pass on these important messages if the people of Tonga do not understand the true meanings and values behind the Tongan culture.

This problem is quite common in the lives of all Tongans, whether they are in Tonga or abroad. As previously mentioned, the main problem is the poor understanding of Tongan culture and traditions and the lack of awareness of the core values behind them among Tongans in general. They physically practice the culture, but when it comes to explaining its value, they either only know the surface meaning or do not know it all. This problem has given birth to more problems when Tongans move overseas, because they live in multicultural environments. As Tongan immigrants raise the second generation of Tongans in a different country, the problem

continues to get worse and worse. Their physical heart is still grounded in Tonga, but their spiritual heart is lost in the Ocean of the Unknown.

When there is a mix-up in culture, it creates a lot more problems, such as misunderstandings, misinterpretations, clashes between generations, wrongful teaching of the culture and the gospel, selfishness, false claiming of identity, fighting between Tongan communities, splits between churches and families, and more. People in the Tongan culture have been able to merge with the dominant culture, but the differences in beliefs and understandings related to the gospel of Jesus Christ prove to be a hermeneutical gap, which may be better classified as a spiritual gap. To help bridge this hermeneutical and spiritual gap between the way that Tongans view Jesus and other cultures view Jesus, there needs to be more cultural awareness to better reach the heart of the Tongan. Pastors who have Tongan members within their congregations need an increased cultural understanding of how Tongans view their culture in relation to the gospel, and Tongan communities need educated leaders who know these values as well. A solution is needed quickly to resolve the cognitive dissonance between Tongan followers of Christ and believers of Christ in other cultures. By doing so, it will help the people of Tonga better determine appropriate ways of communicating, connecting, and interpreting their culture.

It is important for ministers and church leaders to fully grasp the very essence of the task set before them. Their main duty is to plant the gospel into the hearts of people and draw them toward God. The overall population of people who go to church is decreasing due to people branching off and changing their beliefs, and, in some cases, people have a false representation of the gospel and fall away. If the conflicts of belief between the Tongan believers and other

congregation members are not resolved, there is no telling how long the legacy of the church, the Tongan community, and the Tongan culture will survive. The spiritual lives of Tongan church members are being jeopardized, their interpretation of the world is selfish, and they are losing the very core values of their culture, which will only weaken their trust in others. Unless churches and leaders invest in their members today, the decreases in their memberships, communities, and cultural understanding will only escalate. However, the cognitive dissonance between Tongan members and other members in church congregations generally creates the most problems for Tongan people.

The purpose of this research is to save Tongan youth by providing a healthy pathway to the future in understanding the true meaning and values of the Tongan culture. By doing so, youth will gain understanding and awareness of the core values of their identities, and they can peacefully merge with any other culture. They will be able to proudly claim their identity and make the right decisions when practicing their culture abroad. The youth are believed to be the reef of today that will soon become the islands of tomorrow.

What good comes of waking up in the morning not knowing who you are? Is it normal to know more about other people and other things than to know yourself? As the gospel of Matthew indicates, wherever our treasure is at, that is where our heart will be (Matt. 6:21). For Tongan people, the world outside Tonga is the Ocean of the Unknown, and it is so sad if a heart is lost in the unknown. Saving a heart from becoming lost in the Ocean of the Unknown requires someone to fish for the heart and restore it to the owner. People who do not have a strong understanding of themselves do not have their heart with them, and need to have it restored to be whole. Someone

can know everything about Peter, John, or Mary from the Bible or know as much as they want about their neighbors, but if they do not know themselves, they cannot be whole. Not understanding oneself causes problems with people's interpretations of the world around them and leads to misguided assumptions, reasoning, teachings, and all the created problems mentioned above, because the heart is missing from the action. When someone loses their heart, they are not being their true self, and this creates the stated main problem, which is the poor understanding of Tongan culture and traditions and the core values behind them among Tongans in general when trying to mix with an outside culture.

The contemporary world makes it difficult to be whole in self—mind, body, and heart—because of the distractions and differences it creates for people. Without the unison of these parts of the self, people become lost. The unity of the whole self is a must when preparing to face the Ocean of the Unknown. The unity of the self includes the search for the truth in everything. When the true self is on its journey, it is a journey that requires full understanding, awareness, and truth. Trying to fully understand this concept has taken years for the Tongan due to the issues presented from the outside world. The process of finding true identity requires a person to know themselves well by having a solid understanding of their cultural values, where they came from, how they fit in with their current situation, and where they are going, and to have respect for those around them.

For the purpose of this research, the Internal Family Systems (IFS) approach to inner-self contextualization proved to be a beneficial method for finding the true self when fishing for the heart in the Ocean of the Unknown. This approach will benefit people in their ministries by

allowing pastors and leaders to challenge conservatism in their leadership, to lean toward being more constructive in their leadership, and to go beyond their curriculum to find unity through diversity. It will help leaders to step outside their exclusive lenses and mindsets to interpret the world in a more inclusive way that includes their awareness for the hearts and minds in their congregations. Their duty is not to change a person's culture or force them into a mold that they deem to be right. Their duty is to change the hearts of the people by providing them with tools to gain understanding and awareness of their deep, true cultural values. After all, inner-self contextualization through understanding the model of IFS is believed to be the best fishing net for the heart in regaining one's true self or the heart of the Tongan.

Methodology

The Qualitative Inquiry Approach

The research method of ethnography was selected because it focuses on describing and interpreting a specific culture or sharing group and the normative priorities of the group. It is the intention that the ethnography approach will best highlight the differences and similarities between both the Tongan traditions and Tongan American experiences, with a focus on Tongan youth. In addition, the data collected in this study will be viewed through the lens of a post-colonial and liberated perspective.

The Compassion Practice and the Internal Family Systems Approach

As Frank Rogers notes in his book *Practicing Compassion*, the world can be quite a

violent place, and that remains true today.¹ Rogers introduces a threefold path that (1) invites readers to know, in the depths of their souls, “a compassion that holds and heals” them, (2) that liberates them from the “internal turbulence that disconnects” them from their “compassionate core,” and (3) that invites them “to feel genuine care toward others.”² This path is, I believe, the way to overcome the feelings of wounds and the images of scars within and on the outside. The inward and outward pathways are like those of a labyrinth, which, according to Teresa Blythe, “is symbolic of the journey inward toward God’s illumination and then outward, grounded in God and empowered to act in the world.”³

Rogers’s threefold path can work with both a person’s outer and inner system. Since Tongans use their feelings in making decisions, IFS will help heal them, despite their issues. IFS introduces a compassionate movement to people and helps heal the wounded parts in their internal family systems. These wounded parts need a relationship with each other; they need a driver that they can trust the most to drive for them; and they need someone who listens deeply to their needs, because they want to always feel safe. They need healing and support without inflicting violence and therefore, there is a need for mindfulness. Mindfulness leads to heartfulness in the inside-out process and is powerful enough to fight against harmful things, both inside and outside of a Tongan’s heart.

¹ Frank Rogers Jr., *Practicing Compassion* (Nashville: Upper Room, 2015), 11.

² Rogers, *Practicing Compassion*, 12-14.

³ Teresa A. Blythe, *50 Ways to Pray: Practices from Many Traditions and Times* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2006), 93.

Cultural and Personal Identity Approach to Narrative Pedagogy

The cultural and personal identity approach to narrative pedagogies was selected because narrative is the most effective method that Tongans use to teach their culture, faith, and identity. The productive roles of narrative pedagogy can be applied to almost all life situations and in all the settings of any tradition. However, this approach will focus only on its role in cultural and personal identity formation in order to find hidden values that have been invisible for most Tongans who reside in a foreign country. Stories describe human knowledge regarding experience, awareness, and action. They help people know who they are, how they relate to the world around them, and what to do. Thus, people learn their culture from stories and traditions and from their ancestors who share information with them throughout their lives in different ways. Stories also help people interpret their lives and identities more effectively. In telling stories, people share information about who they are and where they have come from, and those stories allow the audience members to place themselves within the stories and grow from the experiences shared in the stories. They are essential for the formation and establishment of identity in relation to culture and familial connection.

Contextual Biblical Hermeneutical Approach

Among Tongan hermeneutical methodologies of interpretation, the contextual biblical hermeneutical approach is the best way to understand the inner self, and it will be provided as a tool to build a connectional bridge between the Tongan past and the current situation in order to see things with a more inclusive lens. I believe this to be the best tool for inner-self contextualization. However, as mentioned, this is not about a change of culture, but a change of

heart. In order to fish for the heart of the Tongan, it is important to build a safe, familiar, comfortable, and trusted environment for the heart to reside in during this process.

The aforementioned approaches are the best available methods for inner-self contextualization that Tonga has for its people here and abroad. They will provide them with understanding, awareness, and profound change. They will save them, liberate them, and help them take pride in their culture, knowing the true values behind it. They will no longer have misunderstandings and will not follow a false embodiment of their traditions and culture.

The primary data used in this research project are interviews with relevant individuals and congregations in both Tonga and the United States and my personal experiences. Other sources include the Free Wesleyan Church of Tonga (FWCT), monthly newspapers and articles, books, published journals, letters, electronic resources, class notes, thesis papers, and oral historical stories.

Scope and Limitations

This research is limited in its scope and applicability to the Free Wesleyan Church's ministerial training and their board of education at Sia'atoutai Theological College in Tonga, Tongan ministers of Tongan churches in the United States, Wesleyan churches in the Los Angeles region, and the Tongan community in Los Angeles. The target audience is Tongan church leaders and Tongan community leaders.

Overview of Chapters

In this chapter, I have stated the problem and my thesis. I have also discussed my methodologies and the scope and limitations of my research. Following this outline of my

dissertation, I have provided some prefatory remarks that will lead into the rest of the dissertation.

Chapters one through five each contain two sections. Chapter one focuses on the necessity of understanding the inner self. The first section of this chapter begins by discussing the necessity of the inner-self model for Tongan people when they are fishing for their hearts in the Ocean of the Unknown. The second section provides some examples of the model at its best when it functions within people's lives. I provide examples of the healing power of discovering the inner self and why I believe this discovery is sufficient and relevant to our lives and the way we live. I share relevant life stories and examples of how finding the inner self through understanding the IFS model has affected me in a meaningful way. Finally, I answer the question of why I believe that discovering the inner self is the best fishing net for the restoration of the Tongan heart in the Ocean of the Unknown.

Chapter two is titled "The Biggest Heart in the Pacific." The first section takes the reader to visit Tonga and to learn about its history. It also provides the reason why Tongans' hearts are so big. In the second section, I take a look at the hardships the Tongan people have gone through in trying to weave together Western culture and its biblical messages with their own people's culture, faith, and identity in order to create relevant meaning and sense for their lives. Customary issues will be discussed by introducing several case studies involving the ranking, classes, culture, theology, churches, and communities in Tonga.

Chapter three, "Contemporary Issues in the United States," takes readers to the US to help them better understand the lives of Tongans living in America. It provides some

understanding of how their conservative culture has affected their lives. It will specifically focus on the Tongan people living in the state of California in the United States. The second section of this chapter explores the issues that Tongan leaders face while leading their people in the US. I examine how and why the problems first occurred, and I provide evidence that the heart of the Tongan never left Tonga. In addition, I prove why the hermeneutical gap here in the United States is a spiritual gap. In sum, chapter three proves that the heart of the Tongan needs to be contextualized to modern times. Tongans' conservatism has affected their lives, their culture, and their faith in the past and present. This chapter provides the meaning and values behind their cultural gifts, hierarchical classes, and their celebratory nature. It also explores how these cultural elements have become the source of their biggest crises and challenges when dwelling overseas.

Chapter four, "The Tongan Foundational Net for Fishing in the Ocean of the Unknown," examines why a new Tongan methodology is necessary. In section one, I provide proof that the old method of contextualization is out of date. It was only relevant in Tonga when Tongans were trying to make sense of the world around them. When the people of Tonga migrated overseas, they needed to reorient themselves to the new, more contemporary world. Section two focuses on using some Tongan tools to engage in inner-self contextualization and to bridge the gap between cultures and traditions. Tongans do not fully realize how important such tools are for connecting them with the world around them, but they are powerful tools for the transformation of their hearts.

Chapter five, "Spiritual Ways of Connecting for Internal Personification," provides some

theological implications of using IFS and offers some methods to help all leaders with their tasks on their journey into the future. These methods provide a new lens and a new mindset for Tongan leaders to see things more inclusively. The first section of this chapter offers examples of how well the IFS model can function in the life of a person. I discuss the best methods for creating a connection between a person's physical self and their inner self and how both of those aspects relate to the world around them. The second section suggests ways to improve Tongan theological education and to prepare Tongan ministers for ministry in various contexts. It will provide wisdom from scholars who are familiar with the functions of leadership and how to develop leadership skills.

Chapter six is the conclusion to the dissertation. The conclusion provides evidence to prove that the purpose of the research was valid and that the information gained from the study answered the study's questions.

The Ocean of the Unknown

I am honored to be Tongan, and I do understand that the people of Tonga in Tonga and around the world speak and communicate metaphorically. Therefore, the hope of this dissertation is that it will be understood metaphorically by Tongans. The preface is to clarify the essence of the dissertation's title, which is "Fishing for the Heart in the Ocean of the Unknown." In order to fully understand the meaning and essence behind something, one must connect with that something to grasp the importance and value behind it. There is a difference between knowing something and fully understanding it. The power of connection helps people take the provided

information and fully understand the concept.⁴ The problem with just knowing the surface of something is that it leaves us with a hermeneutical and spiritual gap of understanding the true value behind that something. The surface is like a fisherman who always searches for a big fish but only casts his fishing net in the shallow sea. Day and night, he hopes and wishes to catch a big fish, but the fact is, the sea that he searches in is too shallow for big fish. Unless he goes beyond the reef, he will never catch a big fish and will only catch little fish. He then sells the small fish to the people in the village and the money he makes from selling the little fish allows him to buy a big fish from the market. Some days he is not able to sell his catch of little fish and he ends up with no choice but to eat the little fish.⁵

Unless one goes beyond the surface, they will never connect to the truth and the value of what they wish for in life. In this case, they will not be able to bridge the hermeneutical gap of understanding, awareness, and experiencing. The deepest desire is from the heart, and because the mind and body are not connected to the heart, the heart remains vulnerable. If we can get our hearts beyond the reef and into the deep ocean, then there is a better chance that we will catch our deep values and restore them.⁶

The physical body is nothing more than an agent or a vehicle without an engine or a driver. A vehicle can be driven by anyone sitting in the driver seat, but if the vehicle does not

⁴ Rogers, *Practicing Compassion*, 25.

⁵ Rev. Viliami Vao (youth minister of the Messiah District), interview by the author, December 5, 2021.

⁶ Alane Daugherty, *From Mindfulness to Heartfulness: A Journey of Transformation through the Science of Embodiment* (Bloomington, IN: Balboa Press, 2014), 172.

have an engine, then the driver cannot move the vehicle and the vehicle becomes useless. A person's heart, mind, and parts of the being are the engine of the body. When the engine runs well, it provides life and power to the self, and it provides a joyful ride to whomever is driving. Each part of the psyche has a mind of its own, and most importantly, the voice of each part helps the body take action and encounter reality like the driver of a vehicle.⁷

The physical body is only doing what the driver wants it to do. It only goes to where it has been told to go. The body, its actions and movements, are fully controlled from inside the body. If peace is in the driver's seat, the engine runs smoothly. The actions of the body define who is in the driver's seat. When the engine is running smoothly, a person's physical actions will be peaceful. If anger is in the driver's seat and telling the body to fight with someone, it will fight; if hunger is driving, it will try to find an opportunity to eat any way that it can.⁸

In each person's internal system, there are groups of good and bad parts. What can be done to have the group of good parts remain in the driver's seat throughout a person's life? The engine is fueled by the good and bad thoughts happening within time and space. In life, a moment of exile does rise from time to time, where a person has to face their past. People are continually listening to voices and messages from the past, and these are the voices and messages that are fueling the engine. The driver is the eyes of the vehicle, and the vehicle is powered by

⁷ Frank Rogers Jr., *Compassion in Practice: The Way of Jesus* (Nashville: Upper Room, 2016), 109.

⁸ Daniel J. Siegel, *Mindsight: The New Science of Personal Transformation* (New York: Bantam Books, 2011), 43.

the engine, or the thoughts affecting the driver. They all work together to create one whole, complete self.⁹

The notion of the whole, complete self is when the body, mind, and heart are connecting and working together to create the best lifestyle to meet a person's needs and goals. The body is useless without the right heart and mind; the heart is incomplete without the right mind and body; and the mind is not in its right place without the right heart and a healthy body. The physical body is what faces reality and sends messages to the mind and heart to choose the right path. The physical body knows how to walk in that path and ways to overcome any obstacle in its way. The heart hears and feels what is right for the whole self, while the mind decides what to do, and the body embodies what is being decided.¹⁰

Each part in the body has its own mind and heart, but there is only one body that is facing all the good, the bad, and the ugly of the inner self's decision-making. This means, if anger is in the driver's seat of life, then most likely the heart of anger will feel and listen to all the present and past negative voices of its current and past experiences for decision-making. Undoubtedly, the mind will make its decision based on the voices from the heart of anger. Like a firefighter that steps in to control the heat, a person with anger in the driver's seat needs to reconcile their inner unrest so they can replace anger with love in the driver's seat. A person must solve their problems by focusing on the current problem like a firefighter fights the fire in front of them,

⁹ Rogers, *Compassion in Practice*, 12.

¹⁰ Daugherty, *From Mindfulness to Heartfulness*, 116.

despite the fear and discomfort they may feel in taking the risk of fighting the fire. The problem can only be solved if the root cause is addressed and taken care of.¹¹

What happens if the heart, body, and mind are in a new place, a new reality, a new setting, and a new culture? Of course, the whole self will try to merge into that new culture, adapt to the way they do things, and abide by their rules. If the body and mind depart from one place to another without the heart, it results in a problem. The problem is that the heart is not familiar or aware of the new place because the heart has been left behind, and memories begin to rise.¹² However, the body and mind will still listen to the heart from a distance, and therefore, the physical body will embody what the heart wants to do, but it will not co-exist with the reality of its new place. When some people move abroad, they leave their hearts behind, and this leads to problems in their new place.¹³

The voices that the mind and body hear are like the voice of the firefighter trying to fix the problem, but it is out of context, time, and place. The firefighter's only intent is to save you from the fire. The firefighter may damage the house and other things while trying to put out the fire. The firefighter's first priority is to put out the fire, disregarding any damage that may happen. How, then, can the firefighter put out the fire in the heart if the heart is in a different place and time from the location of the firefighter? That is the problem with the heart living in a different place from the mind and body. The heart is in the Ocean of Unknown. The heart may

¹¹ Daugherty, *From Mindfulness to Heartfulness*, 139.

¹² Daugherty, *From Mindfulness to Heartfulness*, 85.

¹³ Siegel, *Mindsight*, 145.

have already flown high into the sky, or it may have traveled far away from the self, or it may have even been trapped somewhere else. The voice of the firefighter is exactly what is needed in a situation like this. How can we fish in the Ocean of Unknown to find lost hearts? If a lost heart is found, how can it be restored and recombined with the mind and body in the new place?¹⁴

In the commencement speech I gave in 2018, I referred to the heart of the Tongan:

My time here in Claremont has been a time of self-discovery. When I first started, I realized it was difficult to comprehend the diversity in the community. The issues of gender, race, faith, and tradition together with the academic pressures felt like I was facing a brick wall. This wall became a challenge to me, and it seemed as if I would never make a breakthrough.

Then I remembered one Free Wesleyan motto: “Tonga Mo’unga ki he loto,” which means “Tongan mountains are their heart.” However, if you look at the geology of Tonga, there are no mountains. Therefore, the mountains in the motto refer to the hearts of the Tongans; it is their hearts which have become the mountains.

Then I came to realize that it was not the wall of indifference that was a challenge, but it was me that was putting up the wall. I understood that if I wanted to face the challenge, I had to become the challenge. Rather than building up the wall of isolation, separation, segregation, and demarcation, I needed to build bridges that could break through that wall by climbing to the top of the mountain of my heart in order to see beyond and to love them all. Claremont is the place where I learned to build bridges that connected and embraced diversity. There was no need for walls because we are relational beings who coexist together.¹⁵

This is the heart of the Tongan; it is a mountain that contains their culture and history. The heart of the Tongan is too big for the outside world, and it will not fit in the largest airplane or ship when taken into a foreign country. Therefore, the heart of the Tongan remains in Tonga, while the body travels with the mind abroad. The Tongan’s heartbeat is beating in the teachings of their

¹⁴ Rogers, “Orientation to the Course.”

¹⁵ Tuuta Sekeni, “The Mountain is the Heart of the Tongan” (commencement speech, Claremont School of Theology, Claremont, CA, May 19, 2018).

foundational culture, which is found back home in Tonga. Tongans grow up in a very conservative setting, and those origin voices are what they hear when they face challenges with their new context. Their heart is what directs them into doing things the way they do. Tongans face conflicts abroad because their hearts tell them to do things as a Tongan would do back home. This has become a great crisis because the Tongan heart has never been overseas to understand diasporic Tongans in their new reality. Therefore, the heart is not to blame. Instead, there needs to be better education for Tongan hearts so they can understand and be more aware of providing the mind and body with the best voice, power, and knowledge to drive their lives when living or traveling overseas.¹⁶

Perhaps the physical body is not to blame in these conflicts overseas, because Tongan bodies only do what their Tongan hearts tell them to do. Sometimes, people punish the body of a Tongan for what they do, but this does not guarantee they will not do it again. Punishing or killing the body for doing what it is supposed to do is wrong. If a person is acting in an unacceptable way, an intervention with their loved ones is needed to educate them and make them aware of the wrong decisions they have made. It may not be a simple solution, but giving up on helping someone correct their behavior before they have made peace with whatever is troubling them will only make the problem worse. Their loved ones need to be involved in the solution for the best possible chance at saving the body.¹⁷

¹⁶ Nancy Loloma (youth director, FWC of Denver, Colorado), interview by the author, April 22, 2021.

¹⁷ Loloma, interview.

If the mind and body are functioning without the heart, then they do not have feeling toward anything. They do not see things in the way the whole self is supposed to see, and the heart is absent from making the right decision for the complete self. The heart or the soul is the most important part of the self. It brings compassionate feelings, love, care, safety, and encouragement to the table to help the mind in making the right decision for the body's actions. When the heart and soul are missing, the body and mind are disconnected. For the whole self to function at its best, all these good parts must be reconnected. After the reconnection, the heart will be reactivated.¹⁸

Fishing for the heart is not a simple task. In the internal Ocean of the Unknown, the heart might be anywhere. The heart may be stuck in a poignant moment in childhood or it may long for its homeland, but there is not an easy way to tell exactly where the heart got lost. Wherever it is, it is up to others, like leaders, to find them and restore them to the current time and space. Finding where someone left their heart is not going to be a walk in the park. Sometimes people do not remember when or where they lost their hearts, or how to get back to that place or time. The body, mind, and heart are the cornerstones of what create the whole self. These three parts constitute the foundational triangle of the complete self. Without each one, the self is not complete. Fishing for the heart in the Ocean of the Unknown requires the searcher to go beyond the reef into deeper waters to be able to find the missing pieces. If people damage or lose any of

¹⁸ B. Alan Wallace, *Mind in the Balance: Meditation in Science, Buddhism, and Christianity* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009), 23.

these cornerstones, they have to heal and restore these parts from inside themselves. Following this process connects the inner self to the true reality of the internal family system.¹⁹

The pathway that has been paved above shows that the whole, complete self begins with mindfulness and following the heart to get it working together with the mind in the practical world of the body. This is the bigger picture of religious education, spiritual formation, and practical theology. Looking at the inner-self models from a pastoral view recognizes the mind as an educational platform. The mind is where self-education begins. After the mind becomes educated, it passes on the information to the heart. The heart then provides that information with awareness and understanding to the actions of the body. During the process of creating the best self, the triangle must be relational, which means the mind and heart must work together to equip the body for the tasks required of it. In order to become the best practical theologian, people need a deeper understanding of themselves, the tools they have available to them, and their place in the world, among other things from religious education. Integrating the physical body with a spiritual life that has been accepted requires a person to know their calling in life, believe in their vocation, and have awareness and understanding for the impact of their actions on others around them. Understanding these combinations will bring the right plan, the right driver, the right pathway, the right spirit, the right mind, and the right heart to the self and prepare the self to face the practical world.²⁰

¹⁹ Daugherty, *From Mindfulness to Heartfulness*, 79.

²⁰ Wallace, *Mind in the Balance*, 67.

This route of integration remains the same whether someone is looking at it from a pastoral view or as a community, immigrant, church, family, or just for themselves. The relationships between the foundational cornerstones of the heart, mind, and body are what make a healthy self. These cornerstone systems come to the mind as inner-self models. The issues that can be witnessed in everyday reality are signs of disconnection within the inner-self family system. In order to fix it, people must dive into the Ocean of Unknown to reconnect, restore, and heal those who have become lost. Problems can be solved by contextualizing the missing cornerstones into the time and space of the current reality someone is living in. It requires a lot of skill to contextualize the heart into the time, space, and place of the mind and the body. This process has come to be known as inner-self contextualization.

Throughout this dissertation, I will provide evidence for why inner-self contextualization is a necessity in helping Tongan people restore their hearts abroad and how it will help them in the field of hermeneutics to interpret reality with a new lens. The dissertation's contents will provide the value behind inner-self contextualization, how it works, and how it will help Tongan people explore their identities. I will explain the meaning behind inner-self contextualization, and I will provide examples, methods, and models to support why it is necessary to life and reality. This dissertation will explain why inner-self contextualization, is the answer to all Tongan conflicts. It will take us back to the history of Tonga to show that Tongan conflicts are at root an internal problem, and they should be dealt with internally. The next chapter will demonstrate how to deal with internal issues and define inner-self contextualization. The remaining chapters will show how inner-self contextualization works, and how it can be

successful in creating profound changes in the life of the Tongan. After all, I am Tongan, and I love my fellow Tongans.

Chapter One

The Necessity of Understanding the Inner Self

It is not about a change in culture. It is about a change of heart.

Chapter Introduction

In the book *Mindsight*, Daniel J. Siegel describes the internal world and the inner self as “the sea inside,” like a vast ocean that fills the space.¹ He declares the place a wonderfully rich place that is filled with thoughts and feeling, memories and dreams, hopes and wishes. He also acknowledges that the sea can be rough sometimes, and it can be a turbulent place; in addition to the happy, joyous feelings a person has, there are also fear, sorrow, dread, regrets, and nightmares. When one of these feeling arises, it can drown someone in the dark depths of the sea. Dr. Siegel makes a convincing argument about a person being able to truly transform when they become the master of their actions through understanding themselves better, and understanding their internal worlds has the potential to free people from the negative patterns of the mind that get in the way of living their lives to the fullest.²

Dr. Alane Daugherty’s work in *From Mindfulness to Heartfulness*, together with the work of Dr. Frank Rogers in *Compassion in Practice*, Dr. Sheryl Kujawa-Holbrook’s work in *God Beyond Borders*, Dr. Jeffrey Kuan’s work in Asian hermeneutics, and Dr. Richard Schwartz’s foreword to Dr. Jay Earley’s book on the Internal Family Systems model, were the great foundations for this research, and they inspired me to delve deeper into understanding the

¹ Siegel, *Mindsight*, ix.

² Siegel, *Mindsight*, chap. 2.

Ocean of the Unknown. Illustrating that the internal system is a wonderful, rich place filled with parts helped to demonstrate the reasons behind human behavior. A person's relationship with these parts this will bring forward the best or worst consequences in how they live their lives. Tomorrow is unknown, and therefore, the inner self must be ready to face the good or bad that tomorrow will bring. People live in their realities day-by-day, and their reality will not be the same each day. A person's reality will always be changing, depending on what is going on in the outside world each day.³

When the foundational cornerstones of body, mind, and heart work together as a team, people are driven toward a peaceful relationship with others outside themselves and in their internal world. This will not only free them from drowning, but it will help them become whole. A person who has the body, mind, and heart working together can become a truly transformational tool who can provide each of these parts with understanding and awareness of not only the internal world but the outside world as well.⁴

This chapter has two sections, each of which will provide examples of how the healing power of Internal Family Systems (IFS) theory has touched my inner self and has motivated me in my ministry. These sections will also provide reasons why IFS is relevant to people's lives and the way they live. They will showcase some real-life stories and examples of how the inner self has shaped lives for the better. Finally, they will answer the question of why I believe the

³ Siegel, *Mindsight*, chap. 1.

⁴ Siegel, *Mindsight*, 11.

inner-self method is the best fishing net to retrieve the Tongan heart from the Ocean of the Unknown.⁵

Section One: The Necessity of the Inner-Self Model

Will forever change the way we understand ourselves and our relationships.
—Mary Pipher⁶

This section will start by explaining the core concepts and the essence of the uniqueness of IFS and then discuss the transformative effect it can have on the inner self. This transformational movement is known as inner-self contextualization. There are important questions that must be asked in order to grasp the method of IFS. First, how does one take control of internal family members? How can one improve both one's internal relationship with the heart and one's external connection with the senses? What is the best way to use the internal family system to build a spiritual and compassionate relationship with different members of the internal family? How can someone contextualize the heart to better blend it into the new context of the self in new surroundings? What is the best way to establish a stable connection between the heart, body, and mind for a better understanding and awareness for decision-making processes?

In Matthew 6:24-27, Jesus concludes the Sermon on the Mount by telling the story of the two builders. In summary, the story focuses on helping people hear the word of God, act on what God has asked of them, and become good disciples of Christ. Likewise, IFS is spiritual

⁵ Jay Earley, *Self-Therapy: A Step-by-Step Guide to Creating Wholeness and Healing Your Inner Child Using IFS, a New, Cutting-Edge Psychotherapy*, 2nd ed. (Larkspur, CA: Pattern System Books, 2009), 19.

⁶ Mary Pipher, Back cover endorsement, *Mindsight*, by Siegel.

preparation for internal and external movements, such as following “internal voices” and hearing the third voice—the voice of God or a motivated voice from the heart. This voice is always positive and telling people nothing but the truth at all times.

Becoming whole according to the teachings in the Bible requires someone to act on the word of God, to embody love in their actions, and to be self-led enough to become a disciple of Christ out of love instead of a desire for reward. The notion of inner-self contextualization is to become familiar with both the theory and the techniques of IFS therapy as a contemplative approach to personal and spiritual transformation.⁷ A good disciple loves with all their heart, mind, and soul. A good disciple loves with everything they have, not just the mind or soul or heart. As it is defined by Rogers, “Compassion is the heartbeat of humanity.”⁸ People need to move with compassion at all times with their internal family members.

The preceding paragraph speaks of a way to heal and connect with the outer self and to spiritually prepare for having a positive relationship with God, self, and others. This method does not just work externally, but it also has the potential to work internally with the self-presence.⁹ IFS focuses on inner body parts and finding solutions for healing each one in order to build an inner relationship with other parts of the internal family. Such healing allows the healed parts to care for and pay attention to the other parts and then move in to help them in subtle ways, rewarding, humbling, and endlessly fascinating them.¹⁰

⁷ Frank Rogers Jr., *Psycho-spiritual Approaches to Contemplative Transformation: IFS as a Spiritual Path* (syllabus, Claremont School of Theology, Claremont, CA, Fall 2019), 1.

⁸ Rogers, “Orientation to the Course.”

⁹ Earley, *Self-Therapy*, 37.

¹⁰ Rogers, “Orientation to the Course.”

This first part of section one explores the core concepts, essential features, assumptions, and healing process of the IFS model. The purpose of this exploration is to gain insight into the power of IFS in the process of inner-self contextualization. It is imperative to bring the heart, mind, and body together in one place to reconcile the whole self. IFS will provide us with the best possible path for the union of these cornerstone parts.¹¹ Once this mission is accomplished, the whole self will have the right decision-making processes, interpretations, awareness, and assumptions, which will allow the whole self to see the facts of the reality in front of it. This is a compassionate movement toward the self and toward others, and it is the core means to fully prepare for life in the contemporary world in modern times and spaces.

Internal Family Systems' Key Concepts

It is imperative for everyone to understand what drives their behavior and actions. Where do their emotional reactions come from? What are the roots of their inner conflicts? What is the effect of their subpersonalities on their lives? How do these parts relate to them and the rest of their internal parts? It is best to first understand and know the tools that one uses to work with before one uses them. Before one dives into the deep ocean of IFS to grasp its core principles, assumptions, and roles, one must first understand the key concepts of IFS and the core values behind them. The key concepts of IFS will provide people with new ways to understand how their minds operate. By grasping the essence of the human psyche from an IFS perspective, people will have the foundations for a new way of dealing with their feelings.

¹¹ Rogers, "Orientation to the Course."

In this part of section one, I will explore some of the key concepts of IFS, how they function in a person's life, and how they can help change a person's life for the better.

The Parts

Dr. Earley explains that problematic emotions and desires really come from parts of us sometimes called subpersonalities. These parts, as they are known in IFS, are “like little people inside you,” each with its own unique feelings, motivations, perceptions, beliefs, memories, and view of the world.¹² Rogers adds, “Every person is composed with more than one part in the self, and they are holistic gestalts, multi-dimensional ‘wholes,’ like entire personalities. They incorporate and manifest themselves through feelings, internal voices, monologues or thoughts, bodily sensations, behaviors or behavioral impulses, and fantasies or images. However, these parts remain inactive within our psyches until internal or external events activate them into the ‘living room’ of our consciousness.”¹³

Parts come in three types: there are two types of protector parts, which are the managers and firefighters, and the third type is the exiled parts, which are wounded, vulnerable, and often buried. The managers are protective parts whose primary function is to secure day-to-day survival and functioning. Common managers include achievers, planners, caretakers, analyzers, critics, judges, and sentries. The firefighters are another protective part, whose function is to distract us from experiences and emotions that may be overwhelming or immobilizing. Common firefighters include bingeing, shopping, drinking, feeling rage, working, suicidal thoughts, self-

¹² Earley, *Self-Therapy*, 20.

¹³ Rogers, “Orientation to the Course.”

harming, and addictedness. The exiles are the wounded parts who carry the pain of unhealed wounds, unhealed shame, or undeveloped gifts and powers; they ache to be heard, healed, and nurtured. Often, an exiled part is a young child part that is carrying pain from the past.¹⁴ The firefighter, according to IFS, is a protector part that impulsively jumps in when the pain of this young child part starts to come up in order to distract the self from the pain. These three main parts help each other to balance the self on a daily basis and on its journey.¹⁵ However, according to Rogers, “Wounded parts (exiles) are healed, *not* when they re-experience the traumatic source of their pain in ways that overwhelm us with their emotional discharge, but when the client’s own grounded self-presence can hear the pain with centered compassion and offer them the care and protection they did not receive when the trauma first occurred.”¹⁶ “Counter-intuitively, protective parts (managers and firefighters) relax and are restored when the protective parts are held by curious and compassionate attention, listened to, and have their fears honored and soothed.”¹⁷

“Parts usually come in pairs—a second part that dislikes, fears, shames, or controls the initial part. This only intensifies the initial part.”¹⁸ When a person has an experience with IFS, they will come to know that every part in the self has a positive intent for the well-being of their life. The parts only want to protect the person, help keep them from harm, and make them feel much better about their self. The protective parts will try to avoid any painful feeling that may

¹⁴ Rogers, “Orientation to the Course.”

¹⁵ Rogers, “Orientation to the Course.” See also Earley, *Self-Therapy*, 22.

¹⁶ Rogers, “Orientation to the Course.”

¹⁷ Rogers, “Orientation to the Course.”

¹⁸ Rogers, “Orientation to the Course.”

arise. Other parts may also try to help, but they may direct the self in a negative way and cut the self off from the richness of life. However, they are trying to do what is best for a person; it is their role in the self. Things might not turn out in a way that the self wants, but what is important here is to know that the parts' intention is always positive. This is why it is important to have a relationship with, be aware of, and trust in these protective parts, because when pain arises, protector parts like the firefighter and manager will come to protect and distract the self from feeling pain. After all, the protector's role is to change your life from being a child who is in pain from the past to being a mature person in the present.¹⁹

In people's daily lives, it is wise to relate to inner parts as they get activated, so the self can realize where they come from and what their intentions are. Understanding what these parts are can help a person connect with them and be able to deal with them in a confident, calm, effective, and open way in any situation. Having a relationship with one's internal family system is not only incredibly effective but also efficient in helping a person change.²⁰

The Self

"The goal of every internal personality system is the integration of every part into a well-balanced synthesis, like an internal orchestra with each musician playing in harmony with the others. This is called self-leadership."²¹ Human moods and perspectives change. The self behaves differently in every situation and may cause a person to withdraw from almost every opportunity they should be a part of. This is due to

¹⁹ Rogers, "Orientation to the Course."

²⁰ Rogers, "Orientation to the Course." See also Earley, *Self-Therapy*, 14.

²¹ Rogers, "Orientation to the Course."

the emergence of an entirely new subpersonality or part that initiates shifting and changing in the actions of the self. Human behaviors that are controlled by this part or character come to the fore in the present situation. This character will change how the self will act and behave and, of course, how the self will perceive things. The self sometimes does not understand what triggers its actions or ideas, or it does not know how to deal with them when it happens. Internal parts all have a good intention for the person they live within and that is to make their lives the best with the best possible way to comprehend the world.

However, within the self, there are two different roles of parts that a person needs to be aware of. First is the extreme role of an extreme part. This is a part that is carrying a burden from the past or it is a protector part that is trying to protect an exiled part. Second is the healthy role of a healthy part. This is a healthily functioning part without any burdens, and that is what the self needs.²² “The non-extreme intention of every part is good. *Parts mean well*. Extremely activated parts are rooted in unmet needs, unhealed wounds, and threatened fears. Extreme parts are merely flags waving frantically to get our attention. The intrusion of a part into our system is always a cry for help, a bid for healing, a fight for one’s very survival.”²³

All of these parts make up the self, and when the self is related to and welcoming these parts in a curious and compassionate way, it becomes the “true self.” The true self, according to Schwartz, is a port in the storm, a place of strength and compassion, and the source of internal

²² See also Earley, *Self-Therapy*, 21, 113.

²³ Rogers, “Orientation to the Course.”

healing. The self is also the natural leader of the internal system. Curiosity and compassion are at work when the self is seeking to understand and appreciate, with carefulness, each part in its effort to help. In this way, the self develops a relationship of caring and trust with each part, and then it participates in a healing process with them so they can have a healthy journey.²⁴

The self is characterized by the 8 C's, which are calm, curiosity, compassion, confidence, clarity, courage, creativity, and connectedness. These characteristics create the core aspects of the self that is the true self, the self's spiritual center. This spiritual center is not of a religion or spiritual practice, but it is the spiritual qualities it embodies, such as love, wisdom, and connectedness. When the self is at the stage of being loved, it relaxes and is open and accepting of itself and others. It is curious, compassionate, calm, and interested in connecting with other people and the parts within the self. Without a relationship of connection with these parts, the self may feel "flooded," which is when a part of the self has been hijacked. And the self may feel "blended" when the self is feeling trapped in a situation in which a part has taken over the self's consciousness and the self has become that part and feels its feelings, listening to and believing in the directions of that part.²⁵

The Self-Presence

Having a relationship with and trust in one's inner parts leads to self-leadership, where the self is grounded and calm and aware when something in the self has gotten really triggered and angry. This relationship and trust will also lead to self-presence, where the self has a

²⁴ See also Earley, *Self-Therapy*, 12.

²⁵ Rogers, "Orientation to the Course."

profound, compassionate, often wordless connection with both its own inner world and with those around it. “A self-led internal compassion models possibilities for transformed relationships with others, a capacity to see other persons’ reactive behaviors as merely activated parts of them, to trust that they, too, have a core self accessible to them, and to ‘hear’ their parts with the compassionate openness that restores them to their self-led center.”²⁶ Self-leadership empowers a person to take leadership in their own growth, rather than a therapist, by becoming the person that is in control and in the driver’s seat. Self-leadership means a person is capable of remaining focused and grounded during an exile moment. The self will then take time to “find” the exile part, build a relationship with it by “feeling” how it feels, become a “friend” to the part, and heal what the part “fears.”²⁷

The uniqueness of the key concepts of IFS are that they offer a way to understand the relationships of the inner parts and how the inner self works. The goal of IFS is to heal inner wounds, provide extreme parts with comforting feelings, and help the extreme parts serve productive purposes. This is called a “personal restoration” or “self-leadership.” When the self is grounded and empowered, self-presence is cultivated, the stage of freedom is reached, feelings are protected, and the chaos of the inner life diminishes away. At the stage of freedom, the self is feeling connected with others in a loving and calm way, and the parts are looking out to provide harmonious solutions when a situation activates a part. In any emotionally-charged situation, it is important not to immediately change the situation but rather to try to understand the part being

²⁶ Rogers, “Orientation to the Course.”

²⁷ Rogers, “Orientation to the Course.”

activated because the emotions and thoughts that are rising come from within the self. Instead, we need to “nurture a grounded self-presence unblended from our parts, to take a ‘U-turn’ to tend the triggered fears and wounds within us, and then to re-assess the original situation with clarity, empowerment, and compassion.”²⁸

When people understand the key concepts of IFS, they can bring their parts under control under the leadership of the self. The nature of the self-essence is to be the director of the internal orchestra in order to play an everyday song of love in the most harmonious way possible. The self-essence can help a person access their inner self with love and care, and then they can connect with their troubled parts and heal them. The natural strength and goodness of a person can be restored, and the parts will be under the leadership of the self. When people are centered in their selves, they feel close to and connected to people in a more supportive way; they feel curious about people in an open and accepting way; they feel compassion from a love that arises when people are in pain; and they feel calm, grounded, and centered in all life situations.

Understanding IFS’s key concepts helps a person freely access a part, separate a part from a target part, disconnect a part from a concerned part, discover a protector’s role, and develop a trusting relationship with a protector or part. Such understanding allows the self to nurture self-presence by staying grounded and taking a U-turn to tend to fear or wounds within the self when they are triggered.²⁹

The Compassion Practice and IFS

²⁸ Rogers, “Orientation to the Course.” See also Earley, *Self-Therapy*, 84.

²⁹ Rogers, “Orientation to the Course.”

As Frank Rogers observes in his book *Practicing Compassion*, people live in a violent world.³⁰ He introduces a threefold path that (1) invites readers to know, in the depths of their souls, a compassion that holds and heals others, (2) that liberates people from the internal turbulence that disconnects them from showing compassion toward others, and (3) that instead invites people to show genuine care toward others.³¹ Following this path is, I believe, the best way to overcome the tendency that people have to focus on their own wounds and scars before noticing that someone else has wounds and scars that need to be healed. Rogers's path is "symbolic of the journey inward toward God's illumination and then outward, grounded in God and empowered to act in the world."³² In this dissertation, I will integrate this path with the Internal Family Systems' model.

Rogers's threefold path is applicable to both the inner and outer systems of a person. The IFS approach helps introduce compassionate movement toward the wounded parts in an internal family system. These parts need a relationship, and they need the driver they trust most to drive for them. They need someone who listens deeply to their needs and always makes them feel safe. They need to repair their pain without inflicting violence, and therefore, they need mindfulness.³³ It is mindfulness that leads to heartfulness, and this is an inside-out process that is powerful enough to fight against things that are harmful to those with internal or external wounds. Before this process can happen, one must be grounded.³⁴ Becoming grounded requires using the breath

³⁰ Rogers, *Practicing Compassion*, 11.

³¹ Rogers, *Practicing Compassion*, 11.

³² Blythe, *50 Ways to Pray*, 93.

³³ Blythe, *50 Ways to Pray*, 53.

³⁴ Rogers, *Practicing Compassion*, 35, 55.

to settle into a peaceful space and then welcoming intrusions that appear in the interior space as honored guests. The latter action helps a person return to a peaceful state and can help someone complete the tasks asked of them.

Engaging in self-leadership means understanding what is involved in being both a leader and a servant to each member of the internal family. One needs to wake up and take the lead in order to become a self-motivated leader. Self-leadership is about serving together with each of the parts as a team. This will cause the parts to have faith in the self (the driver), because they are influenced by each other. The main part can lead and care for the other parts that are in need for the sake of the whole person's health and wholeness. Such caring is the way to stay grounded within self-leadership actions. If staying grounded is happening, then both the self and its family members are always coming into new possibilities, a continuous becoming and returning to a multiplicity of possibilities. Grounding is how to prevent major damage before it happens to a part, and it is part of a manager's role.³⁵

Protection Plan

Once the internal family has come together as one, it still needs protection from any unforeseen challenges. The IFS approach provides a protection plan using managers, exiles, and firefighters. The intention of managers is to formulate a method that can and will prevent other members from seeking assistance from a bad driver if bad things happen. They do this by identifying the exile parts and helping each member to see past them. A manager understands

³⁵ Daniel S. Schipani, *Multifaith Views in Spiritual Care* (Kitchener, Ont.: Pandora Press, 2013), 98.

that the internal members of their family trust them to care for them and lead them away from the conflicts they may encounter. Even though exiles suffer by carrying wounded and unhealed parts, they are necessary in helping the firefighter find a way to balance and harmonize the group. This is an especially important aspect of IFS, because it teaches leaders to first turn inward and tend to the wounds they may bear before turning to others.³⁶

Assumptions of the IFS Model and the Process of Healing

After a person reaches the goal of IFS personal restoration, they have a better relationship with their family members, friends, and strangers because there are not any internal wounds preventing full engagement with others. Engaging deeply with their inner selves through IFS, and gaining the capacity to access their seat of consciousness (through heart-filled and mindful awareness), can help people ground their hearts in self-awareness and compassion. The study of psycho-spiritual approaches allows the brain to connect with the inner self in a more spiritual way. The brain understands the new ideas of IFS and how to build a relationship and connect with the inner parts.³⁷

There is a difference between knowing about something and experiencing it. This study, based on my personal experience, can have an impact in both scientific and religious fields of study. Each of these fields might hold a distinct perspective, but that does not mean it is the only perspective out there. How can science and religion find unity through diversity? Daugherty

³⁶ Rogers, "Orientation to the Course."

³⁷ Rogers, "Orientation to the Course."

extends the link between mind and brain to the connection between mind and heart.³⁸ This is essentially the way that the brain, theology, the mind, and feelings work together to create a reaction. Daugherty says, “It is not simply enough to understand how our minds work; we must also learn how to use them to our own advantages.”³⁹ Using faith is a great tool for healing and creating a healthy, joyful life.

Some of our internal family parts are suffering from various kinds of wounds, and they all need liberation and answers for their needs. In order to address their needs, people who want to help need to first be grounded, focused, and attentive for the results to be the best outcomes. People need to know and realize the impact of taking care of their overall well-being through purifying the mind of its afflictions, cultivating virtue, and gaining contemplative insight into the nature of reality. People need healthy and clear minds and emotions for a healthy relationship with the inner self and family. First, one must have a willing heart to begin engaging in any compassion movement, so one does not turn away or give up. A person must believe and have faith in what they are doing in order to help drive those parts that are in unfortunate circumstances, like exile. Engaging deeply in IFS can ground one’s heart in self-awareness and compassion toward one’s own inner self. It is important, then, to provide each part with knowledge and to let it learn to play its role for the best outcomes.⁴⁰

³⁸ Alane Daugherty, *From Mindfulness to Heartfulness: A Journey of Transformation through the Science of Embodiment* (Bloomington, IN: Balboa Press, 2014), 9. See also Earley, *Self-Therapy*, 268.

³⁹ Daugherty, *From Mindfulness to Heartfulness*, 4.

⁴⁰ Daugherty, *From Mindfulness to Heartfulness*, 74. See also Earley, *Self-Therapy*, 281.

IFS provides the tools and mind for healing by helping construct a new routine as a new healing process for life. In the section on the power of attention in chapter three of *From Mindfulness to Heartfulness*, Daugherty explains how the mind is redirected into thinking something more. It is important to understand how the brain, biochemistry, and heart work together as a physiological system. This chemistry is seen in every experience that people routinely have. Thus, people need to understand what they can control by paying attention to their habits. Once someone places their attention on something, then the neural networks in the brain fire a response and record that experience. According to Daugherty, if there are things in our present keeping us in emotional chaos, then we need a change in the way our attention is focused in order to empower change or healing.⁴¹ “When we do the same thing over and over again, including where we place our attention, we just get better at doing that thing, and this guides our further perceptions.”⁴² The best way to form an understanding of the power of attention and to fully grasp the reason behind it (so that no one can take this power away) is through repetition. Although understanding the power of attention is beneficial, a person’s neural networks will still fire in response to the stimulant right in front of them. Focusing one’s attention is helpful and lifesaving, but it needs to be done over and over again.⁴³

⁴¹ Alane Daugherty, Chapter three of *From Mindfulness to Heartfulness*, Psycho-spiritual Approaches to Contemplative Transformation: IFS as a Spiritual Path (class lecture, Claremont School of Theology, Claremont, CA, September 17, 2019).

⁴² Daugherty, *From Mindfulness to Heartfulness*, 82.

⁴³ Daugherty, *From Mindfulness to Heartfulness*, 71, 74, 121.

Compassionate Movement toward Self and Others

In this second part of section one, I will use my personal experience to provide examples of the transformative power of IFS. I have practiced the movements of IFS both personally and in my ministry work. Inner-self contextualization begins with the spiritual preparation of the self to offer compassion toward others. Thus, before stepping into the outside world, people must first have an idea of who they are and what they want. When people fully understand themselves, they can easily contextualize themselves to a safe space in the contemporary world that is worth living in.

Compassion toward the Self

In a broken world, compassion is the most valuable thing a person can have. People who offer compassion ought to be faithful to their stewardship, their shepherding, and their following the leadership of the Spirit. What can a human do without the help of the Spirit? Compassionate movement is the most important thing people can use to make the world a better place. Everyone needs healing, a relationship with transcendence, a relationship with self, relationships with others, and relationships with compassionate action. People need others to participate in their lives. They need words of inspiration and empowerment, and they need a spiritual relationship with someone they can interact with.⁴⁴ Thus, it is imperative to listen to people's cries and to act to find a way to heal them, to restore what they have lost, to sustain them, to help strengthen their hope for aiming high, to guide them in the right direction in faith and love, and to help them reconcile with other people. This is why we should hold on to values of compassion, so we can

⁴⁴ Rogers, *Practicing Compassion*, 29.

keep on breaking down barriers and building bridges that give us a connection, so we can see and hear each other, and so we can teach others the love of God that equalizes us. People all need to know that the divine is present in their hearts at all times.⁴⁵

Before I began practicing compassion toward myself, I asked some leading questions: How am I taking control of my internal family members? How can I improve both my internal relationship with my heart and my external connection with the senses? How can I educate my internal family system to have a spiritually compassionate relationship with each part within the family? How can I offer a compassionate movement toward myself? For this experience, I used Internal Family Systems techniques to cultivate a sense of compassion toward myself. I focused on applying the IFS techniques internally with my self in preparation for engaging any issues my self might face. It was my hope that by practicing IFS, this method would prepare my internal family system to approach an issue in a more compassionate way.⁴⁶

In chapter three of his book *Self-Therapy*, Jay Earley describes how he helped a fifty-year-old British teacher on a journey through a complete IFS session in one of his classes.⁴⁷ Earley offers a transcript from this session, which was remarkably interesting to me and became a regular life practice for me. The story of Joe and his wife, Maureen, resonated in a way that I felt was relevant in my life. In this book, Earley presents a new way of understanding how the mind works. This understanding is based on a powerful form of psychotherapy called Internal Family Systems Therapy (IFS). The section that discusses Jay's session with his student proved

⁴⁵ Rogers, *Practicing Compassion*, 26.

⁴⁶ Rogers, "Orientation to the Course." See also Earley, *Self-Therapy*, chap. 3.

⁴⁷ Earley, *Self-Therapy*, chap. 3.

to be especially useful in determining how to offer compassion to someone.⁴⁸

Practicing taking an inner journey with the intention of building a good relationship with all the inner parts of my self proved to be an insightful journey for me. This practice was like performing the transcript Earley provides. The first step was exploring all the memories that kept coming up from different parts of my self. The second step involved analyzing the different parts by contacting them directly. For the third step, I focused on separating the different parts. Fourth, it became clear which confusing parts were more difficult to locate within myself. The final step required better identifying these parts and taking control of them. If the control were broken or lost it would require starting the process over from the beginning to ensure the level of control was restored. It is imperative that one faces their adversary prior to starting the journey of restoring themselves to being whole. Someone going through this process first needs to identify and evaluate the offensive behavior of the adversary and find common ground to resolve the behavior more effectively.⁴⁹

The focus here is to offer compassion toward the offensive parts and to win them over into a right relationship; otherwise, violence and misunderstanding will continue to escalate. IFS is focused on inner body parts and on finding solutions for healing them in order to build an inner relationship among the parts in the family. One needs to care for and pay attention to wounded parts and move in to help them. This is a particularly important aspect of IFS because it teaches one to first turn inward and tend to the erratic pulse within oneself before turning to

⁴⁸ Earley, *Self-Therapy*, 37.

⁴⁹ Earley, *Self-Therapy*, 37.

others.⁵⁰

At first it was difficult to break away from my parts and to be open to the changes that occurred during this process. The changing of the heart can cause one to feel dizzy, out of place, and even shut down when bad memories arise. If one enters this process, one must be ready to confront issues directly instead of just trying to analyze them from afar. Entering this process without spiritual guidance and strength can cause issues in the process. For me, relying on the Spirit brought more positive results than trying to engage in the process without the Spirit. Once I began identifying and talking to the confused parts of my body, I had the power to control them.⁵¹

Practicing IFS had a profound impact on me; I noticed powerful things were happening to me. Following the practice provided me with an opportunity to take control of my internal family members and help them find inner peace. The intention of all these inner parts is to create a positive outcome for the self. After reaching the goal of IFS personal restoration, I gained an inner relationship with family members and friends, and best of all, I took care of the body parts that really needed attention. As a result of this practice, which involved connecting all my parts and becoming whole, I found a lot of freedom. Now the parts of my self are one big happy family, because they are working together as a team.⁵² Engaging deeply and using all one's capacity to access the "seat of consciousness" can help ground one's heart in self-awareness and

⁵⁰ Daniel Goleman, *The Meditative Mind: The Varieties of Meditative Experience* (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 2004), 104. See also Daugherty, *From Mindfulness to Heartfulness*, 144; Earley, *Self-Therapy*, 121.

⁵¹ Earley, *Self-Therapy*, 197.

⁵² See Siegel, *Mindsight*, 65.

compassion that is attentive to the inner self.⁵³

It was amazing to see the differences between the old self and the transformed person I became after taking my inner journey. This journey provided the opportunity for me to have protectors present in my life. The parts that usually cause confusion are now finally controllable. My experience provides a beautiful demonstration of the healing power of IFS. IFS shows the uniqueness of respect and caring for the self and opens the deepest places within the self. The negative parts can be healed through a relationship with the self and through an unburdening ritual. Embodying IFS can help people with any challenges that may arise. Engaging in IFS enables one to face with compassion any claim, disagreement, or response that life brings to the table and to stay grounded.⁵⁴

The practice of IFS prepares the whole self to always be ready to approach any issue in a more compassionate way. Engaging deeply in IFS can ground a heart in self-awareness and compassion toward one's own inner self. It is important to provide each inner part with knowledge and to let it learn to play its role for the best outcome. IFS has provided me with the tools and mindset for a healing process that will help reconstruct a new routine as a new healing process for life.⁵⁵

My internal self is now in training to bring about a healthier outcome and is now beginning to connect to others more with love. The practice of IFS is now bringing my self to a happier and stress-free stage during these challenging times. The new knowledge I have gained

⁵³ Earley, *Self-Therapy*, 74.

⁵⁴ Earley, *Self-Therapy*, 9. See also Daugherty, *From Mindfulness to Heartfulness*, 4, 74.

⁵⁵ Earley, *Self-Therapy*, 253.

is helpful and lifesaving to the inner self. As one releases one's old self and takes on a newer whole self, one can be overcome by feelings of freedom. The IFS process provides the ability to put the self in the driver's seat in order to control inner family parts and to create a unity of all cornerstone parts.⁵⁶

Compassion toward Others

In Tonga, there are victims of social and political wounds. Tongan people have never been measured by their power but by their compassionate actions. With the new movement of democracy that tried to remove the power of the king, the Tongan people were hurt, and many are still affected. The nobles are now taking the land of the people away and these people have become vulnerable. The Democratic Party assumed that Tongans were interested in their new movement, but this resulted in more people being hurt. I will continue to cultivate compassion because Tongan people need healing and restoration of their lives and identities.

How ought people to engage in compassionate actions for others? Compassion is a very noble task, because it is not based on what a person wants, but rather, it comes from the love that lives in a person's heart. Compassion does not see with the eyes, but with the heart. How then can people transfer their love and care to the vulnerable and needy? Compassion practices provide unique understandings of how to provide compassion to those in need, including oneself. This is why I believe compassion practices are essential for all people; these practices are not restricted to only a few, but can be applied by people in all contexts.⁵⁷

⁵⁶ Earley, *Self-Therapy*, 51.

⁵⁷ Rogers, *Practicing Compassion*, 81.

A compassionate person is one who realizes that the love of God is for the whole world, not just them. They know how to help people gain insight into the nature and development of their problems. They help people change their behaviors, build relationships, and grow spiritually with love and care. A compassionate person is one who knows when to listen to understand and when to listen to reply and who knows that faith that makes its power felt through love. People need others to hear them out and support them according to their needs; it gives people hope when one knows how to help and how to give them a possible path in agreement with their desires. Practicing compassion is a great way to continue cultivating compassion in one's life and a great rule to live by. The best way to maintain relationships is to keep on building the bridge of compassion to reach people whenever they need help from others.⁵⁸

In chapter four of his book *Compassion in Practice*, Rogers shares an example of “taking the other’s PULSE.” *PULSE* is Rogers’ acronym for the essential components of compassionate practice: Paying attention, Understanding empathically, Loving with connection, Sensing the sacredness, and Embodying new life.⁵⁹ Rogers talks about an old man in a wheelchair who was trying to dance to the music by himself inside a bar, and this moved his friend with compassion to stand up and ask him for a dance. The outcome was a joyful heart in each of them. “Such compassion for others can also be cultivated. When we are not open to a compassionate connection with someone—when we are feeling reactive, dismissive, frightened, overwhelmed,

⁵⁸ Rogers, *Practicing Compassion*, 105.

⁵⁹ Frank Rogers Jr., *Compassion in Practice: The Way of Jesus* (Nashville: Upper Room, 2016), 23.

or even simply numb and distracted—an interior movement holds us in its grasp.”⁶⁰ This was an important lesson for me because it taught me to first turn inward and tend the erratic pulse within myself before I could turn to others.

Practicing taking another person’s PULSE with the intention of building a spiritual relationship and connection with them helps one better reach someone who has lost their heart in the Ocean of the Unknown. The PULSE practice proceeds as follows: (1) Pay attention by cultivating a nonreactive awareness of what the other person is doing and how they are doing it. (2) Understand empathetically, listening for the hidden suffering within their emotions or behavior, including the fear, longing, wounds, or stifled gifts aching to be tended to. (3) Love with connectedness, and the best way to show that love is by noticing the suffering in another, helping bring it to the surface, and finding a way to heal them. (4) Sense the sacred within the individual and inviting that sacred presence to open up and hold and heal the suffering within the person. (5) Embody a new life by noticing the changes in the person and by helping them commit to living a new, restored life.⁶¹ Taking the time to feel another’s PULSE helps one improve one’s spiritual health and draw closer to God and others. Following this practice allows one to hear a third voice or the voice of God. Practicing taking others’ PULSES helps strengthen one’s love for others and one’s desire to help serve them.⁶²

The best way to fully experience the life-changing effects of the PULSE practice is by opening one’s heart and inviting the Spirit to be present. Having the Spirit present makes it so

⁶⁰ Rogers, *Practicing Compassion*, 41.

⁶¹ Rogers, *Compassion in Practice*, 23.

⁶² Rogers, *Compassion in Practice*, 72.

every movement made toward helping others is full of compassion. I have experienced a noticeable difference when trying to help others find their inner peace when I felt the Spirit was present. The PULSE practice works better when it is full of love and compassion toward others. Having love and compassion toward others helped me to reflect on what is happening in their lives and to use this understanding to help them. It is wonderful to see how the power of the Spirit can help heal and change a person's life. The PULSE practice helps improve relationships with others regardless of race, income, or social ranking.⁶³

Taking people's PULSE is a wonderful practice because it helps all actions to be fueled with compassion, and it helps people move on to having more whole inner selves. This practice is beneficial for everyday use because it helps connect people to the sacred source and stay grounded with compassion, love, and care. A great example of serving others is someone being moved by compassion to push an old man in his wheelchair. Sure, the old man could figure out how to get where he wants to by himself, but having another person step in to help him shows him that someone else cares about him. By embodying compassion in our everyday lives, we can help others connect to a sacred Source.⁶⁴

Section Conclusion

My life in the United States proved to be very different from my life in Tonga. I experienced a lot of changes related to culture, the way people interact with each other, and the overall environment. At first, it was an incredibly challenging time adapting to these changes.

⁶³ Rogers, *Practicing Compassion*, 88.

⁶⁴ Rogers, *Practicing Compassion*, chap. 4.

The transition took years and required making a decision to either sink or swim in this new environment. It was a completely new context and it required seeing people in a different way in order to make a breakthrough in adapting to this new environment. Adjusting to the prevalent culture in the United States was a challenge for me. Normal, everyday activities, like wearing long pants to church, eating non-Tongan food, paying high rent, and working shifts at a new job, were all challenges that I needed to conquer.⁶⁵ Activities like these became challenges for me because Tongans are not accustomed to merging or blending into a Western culture like the one in the United States. Tongans in the US still think like Tongans from the islands; first-generation Tongans continues to live their lives like they are still in Tonga, and they hold onto their Tongan traditions. First-generation Tongan Americans tend to distance themselves from the culture in the United States, although the second generation of Tongan Americans is more open to integrating themselves into the American culture. The issues between these two generations increase heavily when they are both trying to practice their traditions and culture and trying to fully enforce them in a non-Tongan place, time, and space.⁶⁶

Living in both Tonga and the United States has provided me with the opportunity to directly witness the effects that cultural misunderstandings have had on Tongans living in the United States. Praying for a way to help Tongan people with these issues touched God's heart, and He provided a way for me to help people find a way to reconcile the cognitive dissonance between Tongan culture and the culture of the United States.⁶⁷

⁶⁵ Kalisitiane Oko (FWCT youth pastor), interview by the author, May 22, 2019.

⁶⁶ Kalisitiane Oko, interview.

⁶⁷ Kalisitiane Oko, interview.

In addition to these notions and personal experiences, the IFS approach to inner-self contextualization has proven to be absorbing and influential, because it provided me with the opportunity to reflect on myself in the context of my people and culture, while directing my brain to see through a new lens in an attempt to better understand the world around me. My internal self is now in training to bring about a healthier outcome and is now beginning to connect to something more. It is now bringing me to a stress-free stage with more happiness. Knowledge of the IFS model is helpful and lifesaving. The more I have studied its new and life-giving notions, the more a feeling of freedom has risen to the surface. As I strive to control my inner family parts as well as the annoying behaviors in my life, I experience a joyful feeling of being in the driver's seat while the exiles are hidden behind a curtain.⁶⁸

Section Two: Fishing for the Tongan Heart

Practicing compassion toward the inner self has changed my life forever. I have found the way of fishing for the Tongan heart in the ocean of the unknown through the IFS way. As previously mentioned, there is a hermeneutical gap between the first and second generations of Tongans living in the United States of America. This gap exists between first-generation Tongan immigrants and second-generation Tongan Americans and between conservatism and constructivism. Spending more than half of my lifetime living in Tonga has provided me with a solid understanding of the difference between life in Tonga and life living overseas. Witnessing the hermeneutical gap of indifference between both cultures has been a very eye-opening experience for me. The challenges that Tongans face has become apparent to me in everyday

⁶⁸ Earley, *Self-Therapy*, 32.

interactions and within the church's ministry, and those challenges need to be addressed with compassion and love. The best way to meet these challenges is to know the people well, to know what they believe, how they think, and what drives their decisions. Trying other methods to resolve issues within my ministry have come up short, because they were not addressing the root of the problem in the most effective way.

At CST, the courses I took provided the tools that led to a transformation of self, both inside and out. Dr. Frank Rogers's lectures showed me that IFS is the key to liberating and saving my people. IFS provided a significant life change in the way I helped the community of Tongan Americans and Tongan immigrants feel more connected to their community in their new environment in the United States. The IFS method proved to have significant transformational power within the Tongan community in Los Angeles, California. The positive results of using this method in that community inspired this research project. Thus, in this section, there will be other experiences and results from other samples to provide several angles to demonstrate the positive power of the IFS method.

The Necessity of Going Beyond the Reef: The CST Experience

Concrete Acts of Compassion

Compassion has been defined by scholars in many ways according to their own understandings and interests. For me, compassion is how a person physically embodies the movement of love within their heart. Practicing compassion means acting on what the voice of love in one's soul and heart is telling one to do, but it is not necessarily based on one's own desires.

Being the only Tongan student at CST in the fall of 2014 was an enlightening experience. In Tonga, everyone knows everyone else, and attending CST was the first time that was not the case for me. The students were all from different places, making it feel like a sea of strangers compared to the friendly island of Tonga. Being the only Tongan at CST was a very lonely experience, especially during the first semester. Feeling very unwelcome and ignored made it difficult to try to stay grounded. People went about their business without saying hello or even taking the time to talk to people they did not know. It was a tough experience, and it was an experience that was completely different from what I knew in the open, friendly environment of Tonga.

During that challenging time of isolation and heartache, God provided me with wisdom and comfort. On the south side of the Edgar Center, across from one of the classrooms, there is writing on the wall by Saint Bernard of Clairvaux. It says, “What would be the good of learning without love—it would puff us up, and love without learning—it would go astray.” Walking by this wall and reading the quote every day made me wonder who the intended audience was, and it inspired me to be a better follower of Jesus Christ. After I had passed this quote numerous times, a man standing near it called out, saying, “How are you?” The conversation that followed was simple, but provided comfort and a sense of belonging in a place that did not feel like home. Seeing this man on multiple occasions prompted me to find out who he was and what inspired his actions. When I talked with him, he mentioned that he teaches the practice of compassion, and it shows in the way he treats others. Learning who he was and what he stood for inspired me to take multiple classes from this professor.

This life experience illustrates the importance of moving with compassion at all times. Moving with compassion requires one to reach out to others with compassion and love at all times, instead of waiting until someone is in need. It has been five years since Professor Rogers reached out to me with compassion, and that action still impresses me to this day. The kindness he showed me healed the wounds caused by loneliness and made a lifelong impact. The actions were simple, but there is no way to thank him enough for his kindness and compassion. His kindness inspired me to follow suit and to practice compassion toward all people.

Winning Over the Heart

The Pacific Islander Student Association (PISA) is a cultural student organization that branches out through many college campuses across the nation. It functions as a band of brothers and sisters of the Pacific Islands who advocate the importance of pursuing higher education. Its mission is to ensure that Pacific Islander students are actively setting life and academic goals and striving every day to attain them. The group also strives to educate members, friends, peers, and the general community about the diverse cultures found throughout the Pacific Islands. Service to peers, family members, and the global community is an emphasis of the group, and this service is expected of the organization's members, leaders, and advisers on a daily basis. This is the foundation of the beliefs that past, present, and future members of the Pacific Islander Student Association aspire to live by. Hand in hand, side by side, they will take action toward their goals as best as they can.

At Claremont School of Theology (CST), there are members of PISA from many different cultural backgrounds that stem from the islands of Samoa, Tonga, Hawaii, Fiji, and many other island regions that spread across Polynesia, Micronesia, Asia, Indonesia, and

Melanesia. There are also many members who are not descendants from these cultural backgrounds. There are a number of non-Pacific-Islander students at CST, such as Koreans, who share the same overall love and respect for cultural diversity as the Pacific Islander students do. The members of PISA come from many different cultural backgrounds, but their overall goal is the same. Respect must be given to every member of PISA, regardless of who they are or the opposing views that individual members may have. The club is a family whose members comfort each other in times of hardship and rejoice with one another in club and individual successes. They work together as one.

Upon joining the Pacific Islander Student Association in 2016, I had hoped to find the essential cultural roles I was accustomed to in Tonga, but those values were not present in the organization. The group had not come together in unity, and in 2018, I decided to change that when I became the club's president. I realized there were some cultural issues that needed immediate attention, and I began talking with the group about the importance of showing their cultural values and sharing them with others.

The Pacific Islanders who were not familiar with the cultural values of Pacific Island cultures, such as having a loving nature, reverence, respect, good relationships with one another, a zeal for life, and a team spirit, ended up not following these values. These Pacific Islanders did not believe these values were relevant or represented the Pacific Island cultures. They also believed they did not have to follow these cultural values, because they were living in the US and were free to choose what they wanted to do. The discontent between group members caused some of the members to break away and start their own club. However, no Pacific immigrant students joined this new group. The intention of the new group was to show the president of CST

and the UMC Board of Ordination that they could go through the ordination process and get a job with a Methodist church.

The Pacific Island international students just wanted to express their culture by telling others that they are the people of the Pacific, and they are here. They embodied their cultural values to the best of their ability. By interacting with different religious communities and PISA, the cultural differences between the Pacific immigrants and Pacific Americans became more apparent to me. These differences had led to tension and fighting in some communities, and they had led to greater violence between Pacific Islander communities and now within PISA. Despite the many differences in PISA, I, as the president of CST's chapter, had to step up and try to restore peace. The first thing that needed to be done was calling a meeting with both the international students and Pacific Islander Americans. The meeting started with an invitational prayer, and I guided everyone to take their own PULSE to make sure they were all practicing compassion throughout the meeting. The main focus was focusing on compassion toward themselves and others rather than focusing on the differences that were causing division within the group. After establishing compassion within the group, the discussion turned to finding unity through the distinct cultural values present. The meeting was closed with a prayer of thanksgiving, and members practiced showing compassion toward each other and taking one another's PULSE in a theoretical sense. Throughout the meeting, members of PISA learned about their differences, and they were better able to understand and respect each other for their differences. Using the IFS model in this meeting had a profound impact on the group, and it was the right solution for finding peace and gaining respect for one another.

From the Film *Moana*: The Ocean of the Unknown

Moana is Disney's first Polynesian princess and the first animated film with actors all of Polynesian descent. The reason why this film is essential is that Disney has a prominent voice in pop culture. Today, the media influences the ideas, beliefs, and actions of the public. *Moana* shows Polynesia's surface culture, which is what people can see and perceive from others: cultural attire, historical contributions, outward displays of behavior and identity, etc.⁶⁹ Deep culture is the intuitive truths reflected in the surface culture that people do not know and understand because they cannot see it physically.⁷⁰

The film takes the audience to a time when there was only the ocean (Moana). The heart of the goddess Te Fiti was stolen by Maui, who is a demigod who travels the sea. When Maui stole the heart of Te Fiti, her island began to die and was covered with darkness. While Maui was trying to escape from the island, the lava demon Te Kā confronted and attacked him, causing Te Fiti's heart to become lost in the ocean along with Maui's magical fishhook. Moana, the daughter and heir of the chief of the small Pacific island of Motunui, is chosen by the sea to receive the heart as she is collecting shells on the shore.⁷¹

⁶⁹ Yvonne Pratt-Johnson, "Communicating Cross-Culturally: What Teachers Should Know," *The Internet TESL Journal* 12, no. 2 (February 2006), <http://iteslj.org/Articles/Pratt-Johnson-CrossCultural.html>.

⁷⁰ Scott Mendelson, "'Moana' Review: Disney Crafts Another Powerhouse Piece of Girl-Powered Mythmaking," *Forbes*, November 7, 2016, <https://www.forbes.com/sites/scottmendelson/2016/11/07/moana-review-another-righteous-affirmation-of-walt-disneys-pop-culture-legacy/>.

⁷¹ Mendelson, "'Moana' Review."

Moana's father, Chief Tui, insists that the island provides everything the villagers need, but when fish become scarce, coconuts begin to spoil, and the island's vegetation begins to die, Moana proposes going beyond the reef to find more fish. Tui angrily rejects her request, as sailing beyond the reef is forbidden. Moana's mother, Sina, confesses that Tui fears the ocean because he lost his best friend when they attempted to sail beyond the reef. Moana's grandmother Tala finds Moana on the beach after a failed attempt to sail past the reef and shows Moana a secret cave hidden behind a waterfall. Inside the cave is a fleet of outrigger sailing canoes, revealing that the island's ancestors were seafaring voyagers.⁷²

Concrete Acts of Compassion

Tala gives Moana the heart of Te Fiti, which she has kept safe for her granddaughter ever since she was chosen by the ocean, and she shows Moana that the darkness unleashed by Maui's theft is now consuming the island. Tala suddenly falls ill, and with her dying breath, she tells Moana to set sail. Moana departs in a canoe with her pet rooster Heihei to find Maui. Moana follows a constellation that looks like Maui's fishhook, but she encounters a dangerous storm and asks the ocean for help. She does not receive the support she anticipates; instead, a huge typhoon wave flips her sailboat and knocks her unconscious. She wakes up the next morning on a small island inhabited by Maui, which is the ocean's way of helping her. Moana finds Maui, and he introduces himself by boasting of his exploits, then he traps her in a cave and steals her sailboat. After escaping from the cave, Moana tries to convince Maui to return Te Fiti's heart,

⁷² Mendelson, "'Moana' Review."

but Maui refuses, fearing other dark creatures will be attracted to its power.⁷³

In a collectivist culture, people are rigidly connected, yet they are different individuals, and this style of culture is organized hierarchically. When one analyzes the group dimension, one can determine how weakly bonded or strongly bonded a group is. In the movie *Moana*, the central group is a strongly bonded society, where they work and live together as one big family. When one grieves, they all grieve. When one eats, they all share, and when one works, they all help. This is shown through scenes where all villagers weave baskets together or collect coconuts together. This illustrates that the villagers in *Moana* have a connected sense of identity. They spend a lot of time together, and they have strong relationships as a result.

The most effective way to receive traditional stories is by retelling them orally as grandma Tala does in the movie. Tongan stories have been written by scholars in English, but the problem is that they have yet to translate all these stories into Tongan. A few of these writings have been translated, but they are only available to a few people. Thankfully, *Moana* shares the stories and traditions of not only the Tongan culture, but Polynesian culture as a whole. Tongans and other Polynesians do not want people to mix them up with another culture because of a film, book, or story.

Disney's *Moana* came out in theaters on Thanksgiving Day in 2016. I strongly connected with the fact that this is Disney's first Polynesian princess based on my Polynesian heritage. Analyzing the film and comparing it to the culture of the Pacific Islands was fascinating. The cultural group dimension in the traditional story depicts how strongly people are bonded

⁷³ Mendelson, "'Moana' Review."

together. The film shows there are distinct and separate individuals with a common reason to be together, but with less of a sense of unity and connection than in the story. An analysis of the cultural group dimension shows the different levels of people in the group and how they take on different roles. At one end of this spectrum, people are relatively homogenous in their abilities, work, and activities and can easily interchange roles. However, in the film *Moana*, a man is responsible for all the hard labor and providing for the village and the family. In Polynesian culture, a woman has a place in society to take care of light work, children, and food preparation, which is not the same for women in the oral story. However, “brothers and sisters always sleep under separate roofs” in accordance with the Tongan culture’s practice of “sibling separation and respect.”⁷⁴

In the nuances of Polynesian culture, chores are distributed according to gender. In Tonga, men tend the ‘*umu* (underground oven), grow and harvest food, and complete all of the manual labor. In modern days, the women clean, wash clothes, and prepare and cook food. The patriarch is generally the head of the family, and land passes down from a father to his eldest son. Women, however, possess high, and in some cases, superior status in other facets of family life. A *fahu* (father’s oldest sister) is “accorded the highest levels of respect at all formal and informal occasions” and acts as the family matriarch.⁷⁵ The first time the audience sees the cultural hierarchy in the film *Moana* is when the family matriarch, Grandma Tala, tells a group

⁷⁴ “Tonga—People & Culture,” Jasons, accessed December 27, 2021, <http://www.jasons.com/tonga/tonga-people-and-culture>.

⁷⁵ “Tonga—People & Culture.” See also Edward Winslow Gifford, *Tongan Society* (Millwood, NY: Kraus Reprint, 1985), 22.

of children the story of Maui and Te Fiti and how Maui stole her heart in order to pay tribute to his humanity by pulling islands out of the ocean, bringing humans fire, and saving them from beasts. Here we see two crucial high-status figures: Grandma Tala and Maui.⁷⁶

Grandma Tala is the mother of Chief Tui and the grandmother of Moana, the future leader of the village. In Tonga, the leader of a village is the heir, who is the eldest son. Women are not allowed to be the title heir or a leader of most things. Grandma Tala holds the hierarchical position of a queen mother because she is the matriarch (superior) of her family and the chief's mother, which gives her additional status and respect. She is an individual who is open-minded and soulful, and this lets her be free-spirited and an example to Moana. She is not just a grandmother to Moana though. She is also a spiritual mother to Moana, acting as a guide as Moana goes on her journey to find Maui and save the island. This is like the power of the matriarch on the father's side of the family in the Tongan family structure.⁷⁷

The rest of the high-status figures represent what Tongans need to do when migrating overseas. It is essential to disregard whether they are a man or a woman in order to discover their culture's values and to restore them. Tonga needs to become the highest status figure in a foreign country beyond the reef by embodying these values. While this is not a formal hierarchical position, it may be more important than any official hierarchical standing or label. Placing Tonga in the highest position illustrates that the culture is still important, whether a person lives in Tonga or abroad, and that forgetting the root of one's identity betrays one's culture.⁷⁸

⁷⁶ Gifford, *Tongan Society*, 21.

⁷⁷ Gifford, *Tongan Society*, 21.

⁷⁸ Gifford, *Tongan Society*, 29.

Maui is a demigod who uses a magical fishhook as an instrument. The respect and reverence that the villagers have for him illustrates the hierarchy and culture of the village. Maui's status becomes less important as the film progresses, because he steals the heart of Te Fiti and brings a curse to the islands. Food, plants, and the ocean become poisoned and unusable; therefore, Maui is looked down upon and no longer has a high status. He betrays his people, making them fear the sea and stop voyaging. Maui still retains his demigod status, but he no longer has the respect he had when he was at the top of the cultural and spiritual hierarchy. When Moana and Maui journey to the island of Te Fiti to restore her heart, Maui is forgiven, and his high status is restored. During a battle, his hook is damaged, but Te Fiti restores it when she forgives him, which helps him regain his high-status position.⁷⁹

These members of the elite are relatively traditional in their practices, but Moana breaks the mold. She wants to leave the island, explore the world, find Maui, and restore the heart of Te Fiti. She puts her life on the line to save her people and her island, but usually it is the male that ends up saving the day in Tongan stories. Moana takes her social status as princess and places it at the level of her people, which helps her earn more respect. This is also an opportunity for the audience to gain a better understanding of Polynesian culture. It is the strong bond between the people and their leaders that defines the cultural aspects of Tonga.⁸⁰

⁷⁹ Mendelson, "'Moana' Review."

⁸⁰ Tevita Sekeni II, "Effective Cultural Messages: Improving Graduation Rates for Pacific Islander Students in Higher Education" (master's thesis, Southern Utah University, 2017), 12, <https://www.suu.edu/hss/comm/masters/capstone/thesis/sekeni-t.pdf>.

These examples show that Moana is the central high-status figure of this film because she has broken barriers and committed herself to saving her people, which has not been a major focal point during the past few generations of Tongans. When somebody in that level of the hierarchy steps down to a lower level, it is an indication of their love for their people, and it shows that they care about the people they are leading. “To act implies a direction, a goal toward which one strives, and for which one longs. This is the essence of the narrative, an agent setting out with an objective.”⁸¹

Winning Over the Heart

Watching and analyzing the film *Moana* gives one the opportunity to benefit by discovering a handful of cultural values, ways to understand them, and how to claim them. The audience has the opportunity to step into the film and learn more about the big picture and how they fit into the bigger picture. The cultural hierarchy in the story that is depicted in the movie reflects the Polynesian culture as a whole, and the lessons learned can be applied personally when comparing one’s traditions to the ones in the movie. The heart of the Tongan is their compassionate and loving nature (*anga’ ofa*), and it is often illustrated with Golden Bands. When these values of compassion and love are lost, it will bring darkness to the living, and when they are found and restored, life will be restored. Ta Fiti is the heart of Polynesia, and when Maui stole her heart, people became lost in the darkness it brought to the village. When it was restored,

⁸¹ Stanley Hauerwas, *Truthfulness and Tragedy: Further Investigations into Christian Ethics* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1977), 28. For Hauerwas, narrative is defined as a description of events linked in a temporal sequence that unfolds according to a plot. Paul Brockelman defines narrative similarly; see Paul T. Brockelman, *Time and Self: Phenomenological Explorations* (New York: Crossroad, 1986), 65.

they found the meaning of life again. People cannot claim their identity in the darkness or by minimally knowing their culture, which is similar to swimming in a shallow sea. A person may get to feel the water with their feet and legs, but the rest of their body is essentially having a different experience. People must go beyond the reef to find the heart of their culture, and they need to restore it to see their identity. Moana knows that something is missing in her culture. She knows that life is not the same without the light. She is willing to discover the truth, and she does not want to wait for someone to discover it for her. Instead, she seeks it herself out of love for her people. In the real Tonga, King Taufa'ahau I restored the Golden Bands of anga' ofa as the identity of the Tongan people out of love for his people.

Audiences can see how much joy and happiness there is among the people in the film when their culture's heart is back in its place. People celebrate, dance together, sing together, eat together, and get along with one another, because balance has been restored among the people. The heart of the Polynesian culture can be stolen by desire, greed, and misdeeds, like it is by Maui in *Moana*. Maui thinks only about himself and fights to remove the heart of the Polynesians' culture and identity from them. That is what happens when people live in a completely different context from their own—things change. *Moana* teaches viewers a lesson that touches their hearts. When someone goes beyond the reef, they should never give up; they should hold on to their culture and identity because then there is no challenge too great. The lesson is to not misrepresent one's culture or people, regardless of the difficulties one may face.⁸²

⁸² "Body Image," The Rhetoric of Disney, accessed December 28, 2021, <https://therhetoricofdisney.weebly.com/body-image.html>.

Narrative plays a considerable role in a person's life as a means to receive and perceive messages and values from the world around them. The storytelling tradition began by repeatedly retelling a story and passing it down from generation to generation. The movie *Moana* starts with Moana's grandmother telling the story of their ancestors and revealing it to her. She explains how the heart was stolen and how willingness and determination are needed to restore the heart. The movie teaches audience members not to remain behind the reef (surface culture), but to go beyond the reef to the deep culture to complete the restoration of identity. The message embodies values of willingness and determination for audience members regardless of their personal backgrounds. The film encourages viewers to not just embrace who they are based on what society tells them to be, but to take a deeper dive and to find out who they are meant to be, even if it is not what others think they should be. In discovering the truth about her people's former voyaging nature, Moana helps restore cultural values that the people had lost because of fear, and she encourages the audience to do the same. Polynesian peoples have been colonized, and the new rules and social norms have caused them to lose sight of who they really are; they have fallen into darkness in regard to embracing their culture. In order to restore the lost light and reconnect with their cultures, "they need to restore their hearts, despite the fears in doing so. They need to restore their hearts in order to connect their minds and souls to their cultures, so they can shine and feel truly alive again."⁸³

When Tongan people migrate overseas, it is difficult to maintain their cultural values, and it is hard to restore their identity when living in different countries. How can Tongan people hold

⁸³ "Tonga—People & Culture."

on to the virtues of the Golden Bands when living overseas? Wherever someone is in the world, they must carry their culture in their hearts and find how it is related to the culture in their new environment. However, if one is to claim their identity in a different place, they should begin by respecting their culture. Every culture has a unique core principle, and the new culture's principle is as valuable as the one from a person's past, but people must understand the uniqueness of a culture's values before they claim that culture as their identity. Misrepresentation and lack of understanding are major problems for Tongans living outside of their original culture and context. Tongan Americans do not know enough about Tongan culture, and Tongan immigrants do not know enough about American culture. This misunderstanding has been a source of significant conflict for both groups of Tongans in America. The solution to resolving this conflict is inner-self contextualization.

In perspective, inner-self contextualization is a compassionate movement focused not only on knowing the messages that have been passed down to us Tongans from our elders but on embodying them through action. The people of Tonga contextualized the gospel messages brought to them by the missionaries years ago, and they mastered the gospel's teachings in application to the real world. Still, they have not been able to fully contextualize themselves in the application of these teachings. Fully embodying messages requires one to not only listen to them, watch them, or read them, but to lead by example. People need to fully empathize and love one another as they are. They need to be willing to feel someone else's pain, cry their tears, listen to their whispering, and give them a hand in their time of need. Sometimes people react with hatred when they see someone doing something they do not like. Instead of quickly turning to anger or hatred, it would be better to take a step back to try to see why one is behaving this way.

People are often more open to having someone change their behavior to be more like theirs, but they are unwilling to change their own behavior to be more like the other person, and that does not necessarily create more empathy between the two parties.

From Personal Ministry and Experience

In this world of opposites, happy times are usually followed by gloomier days. In the year 2013, the Free Wesleyan Church of Tonga in Los Angeles took a turn for the worse. The church had split in September of that year, which left the congregation without a pastor for more than two years. After two years, they recognized that it was time to have a spiritual leader for their congregation. Immediately, they contacted the president of the Wesleyan church in Tonga asking for a pastor. The Tongan conference called a retired pastor from Tonga to fill that position, but the pastor had never worked in an environment or context other than Tonga.⁸⁴

On March 19, 2014, the replacement pastor began to play his pastoral role as the new sheriff in town. The congregation had high expectations that the change in leadership would not affect the way things were and that everything would stay the same. However, his leadership did not meet those expectations and it became problematic. The church was still devastated by the loss of their previous pastor due to their undeniably close relationship with them.⁸⁵ When the new pastor arrived, he instantly forced the closure of all programs and required the church to abide by the traditional ways of Tonga. He was unaware of the new context and culture of the place that he was called to serve. Unfortunately, some families disagreed with the new pastor's

⁸⁴ Talaiasi Taufa (FWCT lay leader, Los Angeles, CA), interview by the author, May 12, 2021.

⁸⁵ Taufa, interview, May 12, 2021.

decisions and left the church. After one month, the congregation started to crack and began falling apart. More than 32 percent of the members left the church entirely, and 20 percent stopped going to church, but they had not made a final decision about leaving the church. This left only 48 percent of the church members staying with the church. The new leadership changes caused a united congregation to split into three divided groups, and the church was far from coming back together.⁸⁶

Despite all the wrongful acts and struggles the remaining members of the church had to endure, the more depressing reality of it all was losing members, especially the youth. They did not know which group they belonged to anymore. Undoubtedly, the idea of the church as a home did not exist anymore. Frustration immediately arose among the youth due to their confusion about which voice to listen to. The church was not a safe place anymore for the youth, which caused them to be silent. The youth became more interested in going to other churches or, sadly, some started getting into trouble. Some of the youth were so negatively affected by the new pastor's authority and the crisis within the church that they left the state altogether. The worst outcome of the changes within the church was that some of the youth turned to street gangs, and some of them are currently in prison.⁸⁷

Concrete Acts of Compassion

Most of the youth who left the church had to seek a sense of home and belonging elsewhere. This crisis, caused by the abrupt changes with the new pastor, left the youth broken.

⁸⁶ Taufa, interview, May 12, 2021.

⁸⁷ Taufa, interview, May 12, 2021.

They felt lost, hurt, and baffled, causing them to cry in anguish. Their tears are shared by those who care about them—they hear the youth’s whisperings of hope and pleas for understanding, and their wounds are felt deeply by those who care about them. The youth need liberation and healing, and witnessing their frustration and heartache has been a hard thing for me to watch over the past year. They are calling for immediate attention, and people need to take action before it is too late. Better yet, how can the denomination of the Free Wesleyan Church of Tonga ensure that this will not happen to any other Tongan youth group in the future?⁸⁸

The denomination became aware of the situation through an article in the Tongan newspaper. Immediately after this article was published, I was assigned to replace the former pastor, since he had retired in July 2014. Although this was a great honor, it meant inheriting the problems within the church and finding a way to heal the wounds and help the congregation move forward. Asking what could be done to fix the problem, I found that the simple answer was to stay grounded. It is appropriate to understand the culture and context of a place that one is called to serve before making any changes. To establish a good standing within the congregation, my first priority was to create personal relationships with the people before deciding to make any changes to the existing system. These people needed a relationship with their pastor, and they needed someone they could trust and who would listen deeply to their needs. They needed repair without having violence inflicted on them in tactic or in spirit.

Winning Over Their Hearts

It was difficult to win the youths’ hearts back and invite them into a willing and right

⁸⁸ Taufa, interview, May 12, 2021.

relationship. The previous wounds had been caused by political power, and many who had left the church questioned why they would come back to the church if there was always this power that ruled over them. Therefore, the better approach seemed to be to create quality youth programs that fit their needs and made them feel welcome and wanted. Doing this led to a great turnaround: youth who had left the church heard about the programs and started taking an interest in them. The new program helped draw them back to church. Their parents came back in order to support their children, creating stronger connections for everyone involved. Even today, the focus is still on delivering programs and messages focused on nonviolent actions for the youth.

The two hardest but most joyful moments for each congregation of the Free Wesleyan Church of Tonga (FWCT) are the farewell to the previous pastor and the welcoming of a new pastor into the congregation. The Tongan pastor's reassignment process takes place every four years. This process does not allow pastors any knowledge of their new assignments before the president of the FWCT announces them on the last night of the annual conference. Pastors will either continue within the islands of Tonga or they will be placed overseas. Each pastor is relocated to a completely new church with a new setting and environment. When a pastor is placed within a new congregation, they have to quickly learn all about the people they are now serving. The church does not provide in-depth information about the congregation, so the pastor is on their own in figuring out the best way to serve and engage the people in the congregation.⁸⁹

⁸⁹ Taufa, interview, May 12, 2021.

The Tongan Wesleyan and Methodist churches have grown to a few different churches here in the United States over the past fifteen years. The Tongan Methodist churches are under the care of the United Methodist's conferences, and the Tongan Wesleyan churches remain under the care of the FWCT. There are many differences between these conferences' churches, but the main difference is based on how these conferences provide their pastors to each church. The United Methodist conference provides pastors for the Tongan Methodist churches, and the FWCT provides pastors for the Tongan Wesleyan churches. The United Methodist conference seems to have no trouble providing pastors for their churches, while the FWCT has an issue of not having enough pastors to provide for their churches.⁹⁰

During my three-year internship through Claremont School of Theology at the FWCT of Lenox, a new pastor was chosen to serve that congregation. The FWCT named a new pastor because one of the princes of Tonga was taking a pilot training class in the Los Angeles area, and he had been directed to attend the FWCT of Lenox in Los Angeles. However, the Wesleyan church in Lenox did not have their newly appointed pastor yet, because the named pastor could not come to the U.S. due to a visa issue. Although the FWCT was aware of the issue, it was required by the church to have a senior pastor if a member of the royal family was attending the church. According to Tongan culture and the doctrine of the FWCT, the senior pastor must put together the royal's sacramental elements and perform the royal tasks. Since the senior pastor

⁹⁰ Tonga Mafi (Hawaii and America FWCT district superintendent), conversation with the author, December 15, 2020.

from Tonga could not make it, and the church would not listen to the guidance and leading of their lay leader, the conference called Reverend Tu'akoi.⁹¹

Reverend Tu'akoi was an 88-year-old retired pastor who led the church in a very conservative manner. If a pastor follows the traditions in a conservative manner, they control everything within the church and give all of the church's money to their favorite person so they can access the money whenever they need to. The conservative traditions the pastor followed did not sit well with the congregation, and they started to branch out based on how they believed the church should be run. After only one year, Reverend Tu'akoi was hospitalized due to personal health issues and his age. During the last quarterly meeting in September 2014 in the Bay Area, the president of the FWCT announced that he had released Reverend Tu'akoi from duty. The president wrote a thank you letter on behalf of the conference and gave that letter to Reverend Tu'akoi as a sign of respect.⁹²

While Reverend Tu'akoi was hospitalized, I was asked by the FWCT to take over all his responsibilities for the church. The president then appointed me to the position of pastor to care for the district and for the prince. After this was announced at the quarterly meeting, there were some obvious signs that there was a divide within the congregation. Some of the members were excited and some were not. The Tongan immigrants were very excited about the announcement, but the Tongan Americans in the congregation were not. The Tongan Americans asked many questions, and the first question they asked was why the church could not be run by the lay

⁹¹ Taufa, interview, May 12, 2021.

⁹² Taufa, interview, May 12, 2021.

leader. Why is the conference bringing in another pastor? Does the FWCT look down on our lay leader? They were afraid of the previous pastor's old ways and traditions and did not want to go through another bad experience with a new pastor. The Tongan Americans did not know how the FWCT reassignment process works, so they were nervous about the results. The Tongan immigrants were familiar with the cultural setting and the doctrines of the FWCT, and they were happy with this decision by the FWCT, but many in the congregation were confused about which way was the right way to go.⁹³

A great adage for not judging others before getting to know them is, "Don't judge a book by its cover." Another, even better saying is that one should not judge airline safety by a stain on the serving tray. These sayings have a deep meaning behind them. In the context of leadership, it is appropriate and important for a leader to understand the culture and context of a place and people before making any changes to the way things are done. Personally, knowing and understanding the culture of the people in the FWCT of Lenox provided me with insight for ways to embody Tongan cultural elements in the created programs.⁹⁴

Reverend Mone of the FWCT acknowledged the need to have cultural awareness of the whole church and an understanding of everyone before changing anything within that church. The need for spiritual maturity in the hearts of all leaders is a must. Working with members of the church since July 2014 had provided me with an opportunity to identify the strengths and weaknesses of those who were in the congregation. Studying these strengths and weaknesses

⁹³ Taufa, interview, May 12, 2021.

⁹⁴ Kennon L. Callahan, *Effective Church Leadership: Building on the Twelve Keys* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1990), 139.

provided the perfect foundation to create programs for the youth in the English language. The youth need to know why they are coming to church, and for this reason the youth were included in every program of the church as part of their religious education. It is important that each youth reads a hymn, reads the scriptures, and gives a speech as part of their education. To encourage youth to participate in those activities, the church offered Bible study sessions every Sunday in English and started a youth choir in which the youth were able to learn action songs. Youth also had the opportunity to meet with the pastor an hour before the adult program began in order to ask questions about what they were learning and to feel like they mattered to the church. Some of the youth asked why they had to wear the Tongan attire, and they were told that as long as they were wearing appropriate clothing to church, they did not necessarily have to wear the traditional Tongan attire. This allowed the programs to be more inclusive for the youth and families that had left, making them feel comfortable about coming back to church. After implementing these critical changes, the increases in spiritual maturity and cultural awareness were clearly visible within the congregation, and there was a new life to the church because the people were in harmony with one another.⁹⁵

Chapter Conclusion

When the heart and mind are not in a safe space, a person may feel doubt, confusion, and a loss within the inner self. A complete, whole self is the safest space for the heart, where it can be comfortably grounded. As I previously explained in the statement of the problem section of this dissertation, the main problem among the Tongans living in America is their poor

⁹⁵ Siegel, *Mindsight*, 65.

understanding of Tongan culture and tradition and their unawareness of the core values behind them. This problem within the Tongan community branches off into a myriad of other problems. This main problem is due to the disadvantage of not being able to grasp their true selves.

The solution to this problem is the IFS approach to inner-self contextualization. In this chapter, the core concepts, essential features, and assumptions of the approach were discussed in regard to helping people better understand the importance of culture in their lives. In order to prove that the IFS model is the right solution for this problem, I applied it personally and with friends, church members, and other people in the community. This study illustrated the transformative power of this process, and the results were directly observable within the congregation. The compassionate movement of the model can contextualize our internal self to merge with any context.⁹⁶

The second section of this chapter provided examples of the transformative power of the model for finding harmony by discussing the issues I encountered at CST, by examining the historical movie *Moana* (a Disney story of Polynesian people), and by sharing a story from my ministry service. These examples were all about showing the power of IFS in winning over the hearts of Tongans after they have lost their way in the world. A concrete act of compassion can touch and change a heart.

The most valuable treasure in the world is life, and it only comes once. Within that life, people are not guaranteed a smooth ride. Life is not easy, and it is hard to see the light from behind closed eyes. Therefore, people need to open their eyes, make the right choices, and

⁹⁶ Earley, *Self-Therapy*, chap. 1.

understand their vocation through the rough sea of life. God is always on the side of His people, and He has the power to change lives. If people have this awareness, they can see the value in their lives, the lives of their children, and the lives of others. The reef of today is the island of tomorrow. The next generation will not become an island unless their parents, teachers, and leaders fulfill their duty to them with love and care. How can people break down the barriers that divide them? How can people build bridges to reach the addicts, the hopeless, the convicts, and so on? Feeling the pain of others is the best way to empathize and show compassion toward them in their struggles. If someone feels like they are cared for and that someone understands what they are going through, they are more likely to believe in and rely on that person for help and strength.⁹⁷

Without a doubt, compassion toward the self helps to reunite the internal family system to make it the best team that the whole self can ever wish for. This has been illustrated in this chapter. The Tongan culture is unique and special because it is grounded within the heart. Tongans make decisions from their hearts; they feel and listen from their hearts; and they control from their hearts instead of their minds. In the next chapter, I will discuss how the problem is not with the culture, but in the heart of the Tongan. That is why this dissertation focuses on the idea that there is a spiritual hermeneutical gap for the Tongan people that requires inner-self contextualization to resolve the problem. The next step is to visit Tonga and learn more about the culture there.

⁹⁷ Rogers, *Practicing Compassion*, 41.

Chapter Two

The Biggest Heart in the Pacific

Welcome to the Friendly Islands of Tonga

Tongan people are known in the Pacific for their big hearts. Pacific Islanders see the people of Tonga as the biggest people in the Pacific. They talk about their body size, and they believe these people are so huge that their hearts must be the biggest hearts in the Pacific. Since there are no mountains in Tonga, for the Tongan, their heart is the mountain. It is not their body size that points to the size of their hearts. It is the joy and love within their hearts, which is embodied in their actions.¹

Tonga is known in the Pacific region as the “Friendly Islands,” and its people are known for their celebratory nature and the love they have for their culture and traditions. The big heart of the Tongan refers to how they celebrate like there is no tomorrow. Their hearts control the way they do things. They listen from their hearts as they make decisions from their hearts and feel from their hearts. Tongan theological scholar Reverend Dr. Mohenoa Puloka once said, “The Tongans feel, therefore they are.”² He went on to say that the reason for this saying is that in Tonga, “The straight line curves.”³ This means that everything changes when a Tongan’s heart is full of joy.

The notion of the big Tongan heart is beyond comprehension unless it is experienced. Each family in Tonga has their own land where they grow their own crops and raise their own animals, like pigs, chickens, horses, and cows. Their livelihood relies on farming instead of

¹ Gifford, *Tongan Society*, 75-77.

² Mohenoa Puloka (ex-principal of STC), interview by the author, June 19, 2019.

³ Puloka, interview.

buying food from the store. There are only a few stores in Tonga, and only the people that have jobs in the government or in the factories can afford to buy food from the stores. The women craft pieces from tree leaves, including *tapa* (a traditional cloth made from pounded bark), and *fala* (traditional mats), for big occasions and for giving as gifts.⁴

In the hierarchy of Tongan society, there are three classes: the king, the nobles, and the people. When there is a celebration that happens, whether it is a wedding, funeral, holiday, or church or governmental function, it must contain four major cultural parts: the kava ceremony, the feast, the traditional dance, and prayer. Tongans must also wear Tongan attire when participating in these cultural events. During each of these celebrations a gift is presented. The Tongan gift contains *tapas*, mats, and food, like produce, seafood, or a pig. These gifts are presented to the guest of honor who is present at the event. Tongans usually triple the amount of the gifts when presenting them to the king and offer a bit less than the king's gift to the nobles.⁵

This chapter will discuss the history of Tonga and provide insights as to how the big hearts of Tongans were first discovered, and how this discovery has transformed their lives, their culture, and their faith, then and now. It will provide information about the meanings and values behind their cultural gifts, hierarchical classes, and celebratory nature.

Section One: A Narrative Pedagogical Approach to Personal and Cultural Identity

A Short History of the Establishment of the Tongans' Heart

Tonga is a small kingdom known as the "Friendly Islands" that is located in the South Pacific. It is hard to identify the islands of Tonga on a world map because the kingdom is as small as a period, a tiny dot on the map, and it is almost invisible. The Kingdom of Tonga is

⁴ Gifford, *Tongan Society*, 195.

⁵ Gifford, *Tongan Society*, 108-156.

home to approximately 107,000 people. The people of Tonga are known in the Pacific for their core principles. These values are affectionately known as the *Kavei Koula*, or the Golden Bands, and the symbols of them are worn proudly by every Tongan. These bands are the Tongan identity as expressed through their *anga' ofa* (loving nature). The Tongan loving nature contains *anga faka'apa'apa* (reverence and respect), *tauhi vaha'a* (keeping good relationships with one another), *mamahi'i me'a* (zeal and team spirit for any worthy cause), and *lototo* (ready and willing heart and mind). These core principles are the deep values of Tongans' culture and identity, and they are the heart of the Tongan. Everyone in Tonga practices these core values as the foundation of their cultural and personal identity.

In the tenth century, the first king of Tonga, called the Tu'i Tonga (King of Tonga), established his empire. The empire started to decline in the thirteenth century due to people sailing to explore and eventually set up residence on vacant islands in Tonga. In the sixteenth century, a new, magnificent young warrior rose to claim the throne after a bloody civil war. The power in Tonga fell under his hand, and he became the new king, Tu'i Kanokupolu. The crown has been passed down through his bloodline ever since he took the throne. The story of Tu'i Kanokupolu's power and achievement played a significant role in his son's life. In the late sixteenth century, the king's son, Tu'i Kanokupolu II, and his men sailed across the Pacific Ocean to conquer all the Pacific islands by force. Tonga became the ruling force of the Pacific for some time after that, ruling every island in the Pacific between Samoa and the Solomon Islands.⁶ The Tongan warriors were known in the Pacific during this era as "the Tongan barbarians." At the time, being barbarians was their identity and culture. After conquering an

⁶ Gifford, *Tongan Society*, 98.

island, the king would leave some of his men behind to rule in his place so they would contribute their first fruits to Tonga.

Tongan Faith Prior to Christianity

Before Christians arrived in Tonga, the people already had a belief system of their own. They believed that there was a god named Tangaloa who lived in the *vala lou'akau* (skies of heaven). He had five sons who lived with him. Tangaloa visited the earth and fell in love with 'Va'epopua, a beautiful young girl whose beauty was among the greatest of all females on the earth. Tangaloa had a son with Va'epopua, and they named him 'Aho'eitu ("the sixth son"). 'Aho'eitu grew up without a father, and finally his mother Va'epopua revealed to him that his father was the god Tangaloa, who lived in the sky. 'Aho'eitu decided to go look for his father. He climbed up a tall toa tree that reached to the sky. When he reached the sky, his father, Tangaloa, was already waiting for him, along with his other sons. They prepared a feast and welcomed 'Aho'eitu to their circle. The king sat at the head of the circle (the *'olovaha*) and his sons sat around in a circle and listened to what the king commanded them to do. 'Aho'eitu's brothers decided to kill him, because he seemed to have found favor in the eyes of his father. When his father found out that his son had been killed, he brought him back to life. After a few days, Tangaloa anointed 'Aho'eitu to be the king of the earth. Tangaloa then commanded his other sons to follow 'Aho'eitu to earth and to watch over him. They climbed down the toa tree to earth. They were commanded to give respect to 'Aho'eitu as the king.⁷ Since trees were the

⁷ Jeremiah Tauamiti and Ve'a Mafile'o, dir. *'Aho'eitu* (Auckland, NZ: Malosi Pictures, 2015), uploaded by The CoconetTV, December 7, 2015, YouTube video, 26:27, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=J-8sVgdvkbw>.

connection between the earth and the sky, between the people on earth and their god in the sky, Tongans highly respect trees as divine and believe they will provide for the people's needs.⁸

This mythical story became the foundation of the Tongan faith, and it still plays a massive role in Tongans' culture and lives. Trees are divine because, as Tangaloa said, they provide everything people need, including food, medicine, clothing, shelter, drinks, and canoes. The Tongan people were influenced a great deal by the idea of the 'olovaha (the leader at the head of the circle), and to show respect to their god, they arrange things in circles: their houses are built in a circle, sitting arrangements are in circles, and almost everything in Tonga is in a circle shape. Even in their cultural meetings, Tongans sit in an 'olovaha, just like Tangaloa and his sons once did. The chief sits in the front, and the rest of the people sit in the circle, arranged from the highest ranking person to the lowest ranking person. Following the example from 'Aho'eitu, Tongans follow these traditions to this day. Even though they discovered that 'Aho'eitu was just a powerful warrior, they still hold on to their faith and traditions.⁹

In the 1600s, a new ruler rose in Tonga and claimed the throne as Tu'i Kanokupolu II. According to history, this was the darkest time for the people of Tonga. The king had his own god, a shark named Taufa Tahi, who was the ruler of both the sky and the ocean. This was a time of discovery, and Tu'i Kanokupolu II conquered the surrounding islands in the Pacific. This period is generally referred to as the pre-colonization era. During this time, Tongan women, during an occasion of warfare, were often placed in the front section of the *sipi tau* (war dance) to praise their god, Taufa Tahi. In this traditional wartime ritual, the people rowed war canoes,

⁸ 'Aho'eitu.

⁹ Sione Lātūkefu, *Church and State in Tonga: The Wesleyan Methodist Missionaries and Political Development, 1822-1875* (Canberra, Australia: ANU Press, 1974), 87.

and except for the few women invited to participate in the *sipi tau*, the women did not have much recognition or standing within society. The women who were not forced to fight were those who had found favor in the eyes of the king and the chief.¹⁰

In the mid-seventeenth century, Tu'i Kanokupolu II's grandson, Tu'i Kanokupolu III, became the king of Tonga. The story of his grandfather and father as heroes, warriors, and the leaders of the barbarians had a significant effect on Tu'i Kanokupolu III's life and the lives of his people. After conquering numerous islands, he started the first Tongan festival week, 'Inasi, which means everyone must give their first fruits yearly to the king.¹¹

In 1773, Captain James Cook, an Australian sailor, visited Tonga for the first time. He arrived at the time of the 'Inasi festival. The king welcomed him and invited him to the festivities and gave him a place to sit at the front table of the Tongans' feast. Captain Cook was overwhelmed with this welcome and named Tonga "the Friendly Islands" because of the congenial reception he was given. The king asked Captain Cook if some of his followers would remain behind to educate his people in their language and the new pearls of wisdom they brought. Captain Cook accepted the king's request, and a few of his men stayed in Tonga for a while. At this time, the king's grandson was at a young age, and they focused only on educating him. Soon after that, the story of Cook's visit spread around the Pacific. Since that visit from Captain Cook, Tonga has been known in the Pacific as "the Friendly Islands." The king and his

¹⁰ Sione Lātūkefu, *The Tongan Constitution: A Brief History to Celebrate its Centenary* (Nuku'alofa: Tongan Traditions Committee Publication, 1975), 15.

¹¹ Lātūkefu, *The Tongan Constitution*, 15. The feast of 'Inasi is a presentation of first fruits by the people to the Tu'i Tonga. Tu'i Kanokupolu is the representative of the people, so not only does he receive the presents of food but he also must give away his oldest daughter as a *mohefo* (primary wife).

people took pride in their new title, and it became their unique culture and identity during this era. This was a vast shift from their identity as barbarians.

In the 1790s, Tu'i Kanokupolu V took the throne. He was a fantastic leader and had a brilliant mind. He liked to call himself “Taufa'ahau I” because the followers of Captain Cook educated him. He was heavily influenced by the story of his grandfather welcoming Captain Cook to the festival and how his kingdom became known as the “The Friendly Islands.” This title fit perfectly with the king’s leadership style, and the story played a significant role in his life and in the lives of his people. It helped transform their leadership ethics to a point where the king gave independence back to all the islands in the Pacific that his forefathers had conquered years ago. Some of the people that had been left in these islands to rule were given the freedom to choose whether they wanted to return to Tonga or stay on the island they had ruled. Some of them went back and some decided to remain on those islands; generations of their families can be found there to this very day. Those who came back to Tonga were each given a chiefly title from the king, and they became the nobles in the land. They were each given a village to care for and to serve as chief.¹²

After deciding to leave their warrior past behind, Tongans had to embody the message of being from the “Friendly Islands.” It was hard for these people to embody the new cultural shift fully. Therefore, the king, in his wisdom, introduced and declared to his people that they should live by the Kavei Koula (the Golden Bands) as the way to embody their anga' ofa (loving nature). The Tongan Golden Bands must be practiced within each family and within all of Tonga for Tongans to live up to the title that they are so proud of. At present, Tongans are still known

¹² Gifford, *Tongan Society*, 68.

as the people of the “Friendly Islands.” This is now the identity and culture of the land and the people of Tonga. In the next subsection, the four golden values will be explored, providing an opportunity to discover the deep meaning behind each of them by giving an example of each of these principles.¹³

To sum up Tongan faith before Christianity, it was rooted in seeing trees as divine. Second, Tongans believed that women had little value in society. Third, they believed that the king was the ruler of the earth and nature. Fourth, they would always sit in a circle when the ruler was present, and everything, including Tongan houses, were built in a round shape. This sitting arrangement was desired by the king. Tongans followed these traditions in their daily lives as part of their faith prior to the introduction of Christianity to the land.¹⁴

Tongan Culture Prior to Christianity

Culture represents the way people do things in relation to others around them. It represents the values shared by the people in a country, church, or community.¹⁵ Embodying these values externally was how Tongan people contextualized their faith into their culture.

The kava ceremony is an ancient practice of the Tongan culture and is practiced in any place where Tongan people live.¹⁶ The drink is prepared from the root of the kava plant, which has a mild sedative effect. The kava ceremony practice evolved from ancient times and has been preserved for significant reasons. One of these reasons is to show respect to the leader in the ‘olovaha (the circle), the talking chief who will provide the people with some pearls of wisdom,

¹³ Alfred Harold Wood, *Overseas Missions of the Australian Methodist Church*, vol. 1, *Tonga, Samoa* (Melbourne: Aldersgate Press, 1975), 22.

¹⁴ Gifford, *Tongan Society*, 144.

¹⁵ Lovett H. Weems Jr., *Church Leadership: Vision, Team, Culture, and Integrity*, rev. ed. (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2010), 82.

¹⁶ One can easily find videos of kava ceremonies on YouTube.

including the Golden Bands. When transitioning to the civilization of the West, Tongans often prayed to be mindful as to which portions of their culture they should keep. They chose particular virtues and values of their culture that merged harmoniously with Western culture. For example, the Tongan *anga' ofa* (loving nature) consists of the four Golden Bands, which make up the *kafa* (wrapping rope) that holds the *ta'ovala* (mat skirt) on a person's waist. Tongans' faith has been and is found in all aspects of Tongan culture.

One way Tongans' faith was found in their culture was in their spirit of respect. Tongan faith and experience were rooted in seeing trees as divine. Tongans believed trees have a divine nature. They provide people with all they need. To show their appreciation and respect for trees, Tongans wove tree leaves to make the traditional dress that they wore. They named the leaf skirt *ta'ovala*. The *ta'ovala* became the original clothing of the Tongan people, which they wore when they approached the king in order to show their respect, the king being the person whom the people thought was the ruler of nature. The *ta'ovala* was made of tree leaves that were woven together and then wrapped around the waist. At night, the *ta'ovala* was laid out underneath the floor's leaf mat (*fala*) to keep it from crumbling, which was an act of respect toward the trees whose leaves were used in the *ta'ovala*. When Tongan people woke up in the morning, they would remove the *ta'ovala* from underneath the mat and wrap it around their waist to show their respect for nature and for their king.¹⁷

A second way Tongans' faith was embodied in their culture was in their sitting arrangement. Tongans would always sit in a circle when their ruler was present. There are a lot of things that have now changed in Tongan culture, including the shape of Tongan houses. In

¹⁷ Search "ta'ovala" on YouTube and you will find many videos about it.

ancient times, the people were told that every home was to be built in a round shape. Since its colonization, Tonga has adopted many colonial implants as part of their culture. For example, Tongans now perceive the color white as pure, so brides wear white on their wedding day to signify purity, and people dress all in white for Sunday worship. Tongans also view people with lighter skin as being more attractive and believe English speakers are more intelligent. There are more and more houses being built in Western styles and fewer Tongan-style houses. Even with all these changes, the circle sitting arrangement has never changed. The Tongan people still hold on to the importance of the circle arrangement in Tongan culture because of the ranks and social classes within society, like the king, the chief, and the people. There will always be a chief or king at the ‘olovaha (head of the circle) to talk and to give the people their tasks. This sitting arrangement derives from the first kava ceremony of the god Tangaloa with his sons, when they first welcomed his divine son ‘Aho’eitu to the langi (the skies of heaven).¹⁸

Third, Tongans showed their loving nature to a greater power. They believed that the king was the ruler of the land. Tongans would give the king the first fruit of their crops and their first catch from the ocean, and they would approach him wearing different kinds of respectful leaf dresses. The men would wear a *vala lou’akau* (another name for the ta’ovala). *Lou’akau* means “tree leaves,” and *vala* means “cloth.” The women would wear a *kahoa lou’akau* (leaf scarf) and *kiekie lou’akau* (leaf waist wrapper). They would wear these symbolic elements to show their great respect to their king, whom they believed had the ultimate power over the land and its people.¹⁹

¹⁸ Noel Rutherford, *Shirley Baker and the King of Tonga* (Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1971), 19.

¹⁹ Gifford, *Tongan Society*, 98.

A fourth element of Tongan faith was that Tongans believed women had little value in society. During the dark time before Christianity, Tongans believed their king was a god, and he was a son of Tangaloa, the god of the sky. There was also a shark god in the ocean whom they believed watched over them on behalf of the king. These beliefs formed the fundamental core of their culture. Thus, the people would annually give their *'inasi* (share) to the king from their crops and their catches from the ocean. Tongan women's only value was to be found in pleasing the king and his men by making fine mats, cooking, entertaining the men, and making the royal *ta'ovala*. They would entertain the king's god, Taufa Tahi (the shark god), by rowing the war canoes during wars. They were marked as slaves not only by the wearing of the *kiekie lou'akau*, but also by the wearing a leaf scarf (*kahoa lou'akau*) given to them by men.²⁰ The women were treated poorly and unfairly during this dark era in Tonga and in the Pacific in general. However, there was light at the end of the tunnel, and progress was on the way for Tongans.²¹

The Arrival of Western Christian Missionaries

Christians from outside the Tongan cultural traditions, such as British or white missionaries, came to Tonga in 1826. They brought their cookie-cutter gospel message that worked for them in their cultural settings, and they had high hopes of transposing it upon the Tongan culture. Instead of reflecting on their message and making it relevant to the Tongan culture, they forced the people to abide by foreign rules and regulations that the community was not accustomed to. The Tongan Christians decided to remove the plant (the gospel message)

²⁰ Marie-Claire Bataille and Georges Benguigui, "Identity at Stake in the Present-Day Kingdom of Tonga," in *The Changing South Pacific: Identities and Transformations*, ed. Serge Tcherkézoff and Françoise Douaire-Marsaudon, trans. Nora Scott (Canberra, Australia: ANU E Press, 2008), 233.

²¹ Bataille and Benguigui, "Identity at Stake," 233.

from the British pot (Western values and culture) and then transplant it into the Tongan soil (our native culture).²²

Tonga kept its people liberated and understood the importance of keeping the native Tongan culture as an emancipated culture. Tongans believed they had already established a stable regime, so they thought it was not necessary to become British. The question arises, why have there been so many denominational splits within the Tongan Christian religion over the past one hundred years? It is assumed that some of the original soil (Western values) remained with the plant when it was propagated to Tongan soil.²³

In this context, Tongans have adopted many colonial implants as part of their culture. As I said before, Tongans now dress in white for Sunday worship because they have come to associate white with purity. We view people with lighter skin as more attractive and believe English speakers are more intelligent and powerful. There are more and more houses being built in Western styles and less Tongan-style houses. Yet, the Western-style homes are not conditioned for or economically sustainable in the Tongan environment and climate. A personal concern of mine is the aptitude of tolerance for white people as opposed to the rigid expectations Tongans have of their own people.

The Oral Story that Embodies Tongans' Compassion: The Acceptance of Christianity

When Christian missionaries arrived, it was a particularly challenging time and experience for Pacific Islanders. They had difficulty understanding and accepting the message

²² See Sione 'Amanaki Havea, "Christianity in the Pacific Context," in *South Pacific Theology: Papers from the Consultation on Pacific Theology, Papua New Guinea, January 1986* (Parramatta, Australia: World Vision International South Pacific; Oxford, UK: Regnum Books, 1987), 11-15.

²³Gifford, *Tongan Society*, 245.

brought by the missionaries, since they already had a concept of a higher power. They were already worshipping gods that represented the ocean, nature, and, specifically, trees. However, two major factors convinced the king and the queen to accept the missionaries' God and their messages of wealth and skin color.²⁴ One, Queen Salote convinced the king to accept the God of the missionaries because it would help free women from their sufferings. The queen's actions can be clearly defined as "Taking the Other's PULSE." As Beverly Lanzetta says, "Here she is now more aware of how spirituality relates specifically to her gender, and she recognizes the seed of equality that will bear fruit in her life and those of her sisters."²⁵ The king then tested the new invisible God of the missionaries. Weak women were sometimes used to feed Taufa Tahī, the king's god, and none of them survived. The first test was to throw a missionary into the pond of the shark god, Taufa Tahī. The missionary passed that test and survived. There were several other tests, but the missionary passed them all. Finally, the king accepted the Christian God. The king believed that the Tongan people had been put in a dark night so they could see the light. He came to believe that all things, which are made by God, have only God as their first cause. There cannot be any other first cause of the universe besides God. Everything ultimately has its being from God, and this establishes the unity of all beings; this is the first principle of all things. God

²⁴ The people in the Pacific did not have clothes woven from Western materials. They used leaves and other handmade materials for clothing. The missionaries' arrival with fine clothes, guns, food, etc., were clear signs to the king and the queen that the missionaries brought blessings from a higher God. The color of their skin as "white" was likened to the color of the skies. The notion behind this was that the king and the queen thought that since the color of their skin was like the color of the skies, they must be from the heavens or the skies.

²⁵ Beverly J. Lanzetta, *Radical Wisdom: A Feminist Mystical Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2005), Kindle, chap. 7.

created the primordial causes as the primary principles of being for all things.²⁶ The king then ruled that everyone in Tonga must *lotu* (pray) to God.²⁷

After Tongans accepted the missionaries' God and their messages, the missionaries introduced two new sounds to replace the usual sounds of the *kele'a* (seashell trumpet) and the *povai* (the war stick), which was used to hit people. These new sounds were the beginning of Tongan spiritual formation. The first sound was a church bell, which hangs outside the first house of worship. The bell was to ring for thirty minutes before every service. This was a new sound, the sound of liberation and the sound of freedom. The second sound was the harmonious sound of singing the hymns taught by the missionaries. This became a moment of transformation for the people of Tonga. They were shocked and surprised by these new sounds because they did not know how to attempt them. For a while, the people were unaware of these new sounds, until they found out that the king had accepted the new God. The new stage of sound was called "the sounds of freedom." The transition from sounds of war and oppression to sounds of liberation, compassion, and love was a type of spiritual formation. From sounds that prepared them to shed blood and to oppress they moved to sounds of love and compassion, which were the sounds they longed for. This newer music and its sounds brought tremendous changes in society, especially in stabilizing equality between men and women. Since the acceptance of Christianity, Tongan men have not been allowed to enslave or abuse Tongan women at any stage of life.²⁸

The old sounds remained in people's memories, but their tunes and purposes were changed from a setting of war to a church setting. The period of rowing the war boat and killing

²⁶ Lanzetta, *Radical Wisdom*, 41, 53.

²⁷ Wood, *Overseas Missions*, 47.

²⁸ Siotame Havea (former principal of STC), interview by the author, May 27, 2013.

was replaced with Christian practices and saving lives. The women of Tonga have found status in society, unlike in the dark ages. The mistreatment of women finally met its demise. Tongan women have “gained dignity, power, and self-worth.”²⁹ The past ways of life and the value system changed to become a more just foundation that benefitted all. The entirety of social and historical life grounded itself on new foundations.³⁰ God united with the people of the Pacific, who had known God primarily through the male authority of a male-dominated period.³¹ Undoubtedly, the changing of the tunes from the old Pacific music and sounds reveals the mystical working of God. The people began to sing, “Advance and await the command, the commander has led to victory, our great enemy is totally defeated in the fight to inherit the land” in order to show appreciation to God.³²

The Tuku Fonua (The Giving of the Land and Tongans to God)

The first attempt to introduce Christianity to Tonga was made by the London Missionary Society (LMS) in 1797, with high hopes of bringing salvation and civilization to the Tongan people. Ten of the missionaries sent by the LMS landed in Tonga from a ship called the Duff. Sione Lātūkefu writes that most historians agree that this mission was not successful due to missionaries being unprepared for their tasks. There was also little understanding of how Christian messages might be effectively spread amongst the Tongan population.³³

²⁹ Lanzetta, *Radical Wisdom*, chap. 7.

³⁰ Joan Stambaugh, *The Formless Self* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1999), 99.

³¹ Lanzetta, *Radical Wisdom*, 124.

³² Queen Salote, “Ke tau o ‘i he tau” [Advance and await the command], in *Ko e tohi himi ‘a e Siasi Uesiliana Tau‘ataina ‘o Tonga* [Hymnbook of the Free Wesleyan Church of Tonga] (Nuku‘alofa, Tonga: Friendly Islands Bookshop, 2006), #444. Author’s translation.

³³ Lātūkefu, *The Tongan Constitution*, 16.

When the LMS missionaries arrived, they brought with them a fusion of the gospel and British culture.³⁴ The Tongans responded well to the gospel message, but they also felt that the strong British influence was threatening their culture. The Tongan people wanted to separate the gospel from the British culture, which would liberate them from British influence. They wanted to engrain the gospel in the Tongan culture to make it more personal to the people of Tonga. The hearts of the Tongan people were like soft and fertile soil. The gospel was planted, and it began to thrive and grow, and slowly it began to bear fruit. Many Tongans were drawn to Christ and became disciples. Some were also called by the Lord to be missionaries. Some were called to be church planters and church leaders. They found life and hope in the gospel, and they believed in the gospel's life-changing power. By doing so, the gospel helped change Tongans' lives and hearts, but they were not changed and influenced by Western culture.

At first, some Western countries, like Australia, England, Japan, and the United States, offered money, guns, and food to the king of Tonga, Siaosi Tupou I, in exchange for making Tonga one of their colonies. Instead of accepting their offers, the king lifted both of his hands, which were holding the soil of the land, and he gave Tonga to God (this event is called the Tuku Fonua). Since then, Tonga has remained the kingdom of Tonga, known in the Pacific as "the Christian island." The king's faith had been influenced by the message brought by missionaries to Tonga in the eighteenth century. During that time, the king's command was that "there will be no other religion in my islands than Christianity," and he named his church The Free Wesleyan Church of Tonga (FWCT). The people came to know the church as presenting itself before God

³⁴ Wood, *Overseas Missions*, 15.

as perfectly as possible. Then it was decided that they did not want to be led by any person or any country other than God.³⁵

The stories of Queen Salote and of the Tuku Fonua touched the hearts of Tongans throughout the Tongan islands. The Tuku Fonua gave Tonga its motto: “God and Tonga are my inheritance.” The word *akonaki* (meditation) came to be used to refer to a practice of teaching women to forget the negativity of the past by wearing a new lens of compassion and by looking forward. The practice of *akonaki* was the meaning of life for the queen and her fellow women. Queen Salote’s voice was accepted by the women of Tonga. Tongan women used *akonaki* as a spiritual path toward unity with the divine.³⁶

The ground has finally been broken on the hidden values of the ta’ovala and the *kahoa louifi*, which is a combination of the *kahoa kula* (red cotton scarf), and the *kiekie* wrapper. The *akonaki* has finally been brought to light and has manifested the empathetic nature of the divine within the women of Tonga. They still show their respect to the queen by wearing the simple *kahoa louifi*. However, this is now done for a different purpose: showing respect to God. The Tongan women who wear this scarf show that they are willing and capable of leaving behind the past ways women were treated and of embarking on a new spiritual journey to unity with the Divine. The *kahoa kula* is the red scarf that brought a new stage of freedom to female Tongan lives. The Tuku Fonua, which represented the shift from believing in the king’s gods to believing

³⁵ Dwight J. Zscheile, *The Agile Church: Spirit-Led Innovation in an Uncertain Age* (New York: Morehouse, 2014), 89.

³⁶ For more about the Tuku Fonua, watch *Tuku Fonua: The Land Given to God*, directed by Gary B. Smith (The Pacific Institute and Brigham Young University, Hawaii, 2007), <https://www.thecoconet.tv.>tuku-fonua>.

in the almighty God and the start of the Tongan women's spiritual movement, became the beginning of Tongan spiritual formation.³⁷

After the Tuku Fonua, the king declared the motto for Tonga, which is "God and Tonga are my inheritance." Since then, Tonga is the only independent kingdom that has remained in the Pacific. The king established his kingdom in 1839. The idea behind the motto became the first code of law in Tonga. This means that, in Tonga, church and state are joined and are not separate.

People must wear the ta'ovala to all government occasions. The government became another church in Tonga. Government employees must dress as if they are going to church when they go to work. The church's constitution is where the foundation for the constitution and law of the government came from. An example of this is that Sundays are taboo for Tongans to do anything else other than go to church. This means only churches are open on Sundays in Tonga. There are no businesses open on Sundays. The government's rules are the church's rules, and the Tongan culture still utilizes these rules today. These rules were problematic for Tongans at first. Tongans were able to work with some of the cultural aspects that were introduced by the missionaries and then embody them physically. However, the core of the gospel had yet to be grasped within the heart of the Tongan. The missionaries left Tongans to deal with the gospel on their own for years.³⁸

Section Two: The Challenges of the Tongans' Big Hearts

In the previous section, the history of Tonga that became the foundation of their faith and

³⁷ Mele Tangikina (president of Los Angeles FWCT's women's group), interview by the author, Salt Lake City, November 4, 2020.

³⁸ Lātūkefu, *Church and State in Tonga*, 87.

culture was thoroughly examined. It was revealed how they accepted Christianity and the missionaries and finally, how they refused to be colonized by surrounding countries and instead, the king gave the land to God. This section will provide information about how the Tongans tried to merge their culture and faith with the teachings of the Bible brought by the missionaries. It acknowledges the challenges they faced when developing their religious education and spiritual formation and how they overcame those barriers. However, Tonga would rather die than give up their culture because it is their heart, and it is their life.³⁹

The previous section examined the original faith and culture of the Tongan people. However, there was a significant shift in the culture when the missionaries arrived in Tonga. When the missionaries arrived in Tonga, it became an incredibly challenging experience for all the Tongans. It was hard for them to accept the God and messages that these missionaries brought, since Tongans already had a concept of a higher power. At the time of the missionaries, the Tongan people believed that there was a new sheriff (a new God) in town that was more powerful than their king. The king was amazed by the missionaries' stories and teachings, but how would he know that they were real? However, the queen had been working behind the scenes to convince the king to accept the God of the missionaries, because she knew it would help free Tongan women from their suffering and free all the people of Tonga.

This section will provide examples of two aspects of the cultural shift that took place in Tonga. The first aspect to be examined is how the original faith of the Tongan people was re-contextualized and transformed into the foundation of their religious education. The second aspect is how their original culture was re-contextualized and became the foundation of Tongan

³⁹ Gifford, *Tongan Society*, 98.

spiritual formation. So far, I have discussed the faith and culture of Tonga before Christianity and what led to the switch to Christianity. In this section, I will explore how this same faith and these cultural values became the foundation of Tongan religious education and spiritual formation.

The Development of Religious Education in Tonga

People need to be involved in the restoration of their own lives. People cannot rely on God alone to liberate them; rather, they need to act as partners with God.⁴⁰ Simply put, taking a gospel or religion that has been established in a particular culture and trying to force it upon a different culture does not work, because the people it is being forced upon see the action as being overly aggressive, and they are likely to avoid the new culture if they feel it will bring contention into their lives.⁴¹

At the time missionaries arrived in Tonga, the Tongan people were known for their celebrations, their traditional dancing, and their singing nature. They were very communal, and they loved their culture very much. The introduction of a sudden change to their culture was seen as an aggressive act. Previously, a dress code was enforced on every occasion. Tongans would wear their ta'ovala and kiekeie before engaging with other people, and the kava ceremony had to be practiced in all villages. At Tongan weddings, funerals, church gatherings, or any other type of gathering, meeting, or event, the kava ceremony is a key part of the occasion. That is how

⁴⁰ Cyris H. S. Moon, "A Korean Minjung Perspective: The Hebrews and the Exodus," in *Voices from the Margin: Interpreting the Bible in the Third World*, 2nd ed., ed. R. S. Sugirtharajah (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis/SPCK, 1995), 230.

⁴¹ See Sione 'Amanaki Havea, "Foreword," in *South Pacific Theology: Papers from the Consultation on Pacific Theology, Papua New Guinea, January 1986* (Parramatta, Australia: World Vision International South Pacific; Oxford, UK: Regnum Books, 1987), 7.

Tongans welcome people to the occasion, and the order of the program will be given by the ‘olovaha (leader).

The missionaries tried to introduce many changes to the Tongan people, including new clothing. The missionaries tried getting the Tongans they were teaching to adopt the style of wearing a long coat, a hat, and other Western clothing attire, but Tongans refused to wear the clothing they offered. However, the missionaries learned about the importance of the cultural rituals for the Tongan people and decided to use their two most imperative traditions in introducing the gospel to them. The missionaries knew that their culture was their life and heart. The two practices that the missionaries focused on were the kava ceremony and the traditional clothing. The reason for this decision was that the kava ceremony belonged to the king and his people, and the Tongan dress code is how the people show respect to the king, chiefs, and others. The missionaries knew that by using these important cultural aspects in their teachings, they would benefit from it and be better able to serve the purpose of their mission. They believed that, even though Tonga was a small country, a little change in the environment or how they lived could mean big changes in the lives of the people.⁴²

After the acceptance of Christianity by Tonga, there were a few challenges that the missionaries faced. They were not only trying to plant the gospel, but trying to plant their Western culture as well. The Tongan people were torn about accepting the gospel if it meant having to fully embrace Western culture as well. One of the barriers with the development of their faith-based religious education was that the missionaries focused on the culture before the gospel. As I have said, the two main traditions that Tongans were being mindful of keeping were

⁴² Wendy Crane and Taniela Vao, *The Environment of Tonga: A Geography Resource* (Lower Hutt, NZ: Wendy Crane Books, 1992), 1.

the *vala lou'akau* (ta'ovala) and the kava ceremony. The *vala lou'akau* was a must-wear for Tongans because that is how they embodied and showed respect to the king, their people, and the land. The kava ceremony was important because it belonged to the king. But the missionaries were introducing cotton clothing, long pants, and hats for Tongans to wear. These were not the only changes that the missionaries tried to implement in Tonga. For a small country like Tonga, small changes mean a lot to its people. The people in Tonga decided to only take the gospel and refused the Western culture. However, even taking only the gospel required a cultural shift, because it was based in a different culture, and there were things with it that were unfamiliar to the people of Tonga. In order to adapt, the Tongan people decided to wear the ta'ovala on top of the new Western clothes. Tongans seemed to love this clothing tradition very much, and they would wear the ta'ovala to show their respect to God and the land.⁴³

The kava ceremony was and is how Tongans receive their stories from the elders and receive their commands from the king, chiefs, and leaders. A Tongan man would sit in a circle and the king would sit in the front of the circle as the 'olovaha (the ruler or leader). On every occasion in Tonga, the sitting arrangement was a circle. When the king's church was first established in 1885, the missionaries introduced a different sitting arrangement from what Tongans were accustomed too. Tongans refused the idea and continued to practice the original kava circle sitting arrangement in the church that the missionaries introduced. They believed if God was now the 'olovaha, they would sit in a circle to receive the gospel messages. The man preaching the gospel would preach from the front as the representative of God, the 'Olovaha. When not preaching, the minister would sit on the left side, the elderly would sit on the side

⁴³ Gifford, *Tongan Society*, 156.

opposite to the minister, and the rest of the people would sit at the back to complete the circle. Tongans feel like they are home when sitting in this arrangement inside the church. The missionaries found the circle arrangement to be a barrier when trying to integrate the gospel with the culture that they served.⁴⁴

The Barriers with Tongan Religious Education in Tonga

The missionaries did not do a poor job in Tonga. They did what they could in the time that was given to them. However, Tongans had to deal with the gospel on their own when the missionaries left. It took some time to finally make sense of the gospel. The way that Tongans were able to deal with these issues was through contextualization. They had to contextualize the messages to be relevant to their people. They had to use what they had to make sense of the Bible messages. It took decades to make these messages relevant for them. They had read the Bible for years before Tongan theologians were able to use the model of contextualization to make the meaning of the Bible relevant to their people. One of the difficulties with fully accepting the gospel was not knowing or being familiar with the context in which the Bible was written.

There was a need to make the gospel grow in the Tongan soil. Tongan theologians used the Tongan culture to make sense of the gospel messages. For example, when the missionaries preached about Jesus being the bread of life, Tongans saw these lessons as challenging, because they did not know what bread was, nor did they know what grape trees were or even what wheat was, because those were things that were not present in Tonga. So, the Tongan theologians came up with different examples from Tongan culture to substitute for these metaphors. One of the

⁴⁴ Gifford, *Tongan Society*, 156.

substitutions they made to help the people understand how Jesus is the bread of life was replacing “bread” with “coconut.” Since coconuts are abundant and important to the Tongan culture, the change made perfect sense to the people. The question that was asked to Tongans was what if Jesus had grown up in Tonga? If Jesus had grown up in Tonga, then he would have used taro, hibiscus, and coconuts to explain his teachings, and he would have worn the ta’ovala instead of the Palestinian clothing that he is commonly depicted as wearing.

The Current True Value behind Tongan Culture

After Tongans started to merge their culture with that of the Bible, it started having an effect on their lives. The gospel messages played major roles in changing the people’s lives and civilization and in developing their belief in Christianity. Their mindset, faith, and culture developed to a freer approach to life. The men now wore the ta’ovala for God, as the creator of all things, instead of as a way of showing respect for the trees. The purpose of wearing the ta’ovala now is to show that whoever is wearing it is a Christian and is bonded with God and nature. The wrapping of the ta’ovala is the wrapping of God and the culture in that person.

The kava sitting arrangement is now the sitting arrangement inside the church. After accepting Christianity, the king built his first church and then the missionaries put a church bell outside the church. Inside the church, they put the pulpit at the front of the circle for the ‘olovaha. The ‘olovaha is the person who has the highest authority and power during the occasion. This means whoever is preaching is the highest person in the circle representing God. The chief and minsters will sit on both sides of the circle, and the people will sit at the back of the circle.

The Development of Spiritual Formation in Tonga

Lotu is the Tongan term for *religion*. The Reverend Dr. J. E. Moulton, one of the more

prominent missionaries in Tonga in the nineteenth century, defined *lotu* as “mankind’s rightful duty to God as God’s creatures.”⁴⁵ He goes on to say that this rightful duty involves two aspects, namely, faith and practice. Faith is the content of the believer’s beliefs, and practice is how the believer ought to express their faith in action.⁴⁶ In each culture, the people’s historical setting is revealed in a mythical story that is told, and the practicing of a traditional belief is the foundation of their faith. Each culture has different mythical stories and cultural stories that have been passed down through the generations.

The Barriers with Tongan Spiritual Formation in Tonga

When missionaries were frequently visiting Tonga, the natives did not pay that much attention to these white English people, and on occasion they thought them to be illusions. As they listened to and learned from the missionaries, they found that they were bringing the living and everlasting gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ to Tonga and that it was not anything to be afraid of. It also became evident to the high chiefs that this would help the kingdom of Tonga be united. It was every missionary’s major aim to convert all the people in the whole area that he or she had been sent to. A missionary’s success depended on how well they understood the culture and the time they took to get to know the people.⁴⁷

The dark ages for Tongan women were terrible. All women in the Pacific were treated badly by men and authorities. This period is generally referred to as the pre-colonization era.

⁴⁵ J. E. Moulton, *Fehu’i mo e tali* (Nuku‘alofa, Tonga: FWCT, 2015), 1.

⁴⁶ Moulton believed that God has other texts besides the Bible, like history, nature, and humans’ hearts, but the Bible is the *feleoko* (storage place) where God’s communication is more reliable and obvious. He saw the Bible as a living forest where logs are cut to build a house (theology, the communication between God and human beings). J. E. Moulton, *Koe lotukalafi* (Nuku‘alofa, Tonga: FWCT, 2015), 2.

⁴⁷ Gifford, *Tongan Society*, 207.

During this period, women were often placed at the front of the *sipi tau* (war dance) to praise their shark god, Taufa Tahi. In this traditional practice, they rowed the war canoes because they were not valued in society. Only the chosen ones who had found favor in the eyes of the king and the chief did not have to participate in these traditional practices. Unfortunately, the women that were chosen ones were usually favored by abusive men. The time of nakedness was the time when the original form of nakedness, spoken law, and war existed; it was a time when women remained silent and were often labeled as the lowest class in society.⁴⁸

In this period of darkness, the sound often heard by Tongan woman was the sound of the *kele'a* (seashell trumpet), which signaled the king's arrival and departure to and from the war zone. The open bamboo sound is heard when the chief calls the women into the battlefield. The sound of the *povai* (the sound of the war stick in the drumline of the *sipi tau*) signaled a time of war. The Pacific people were very familiar with these different sounds and what they meant during the dark night and were always prepared to respond to their calls. Unfortunately, these were sounds of crying, bloodshed, and suffering. In retrospect, these sounds did not give people a sense of spiritual hope or liberation. According to Adrienne Kaeppler, this is the only type of life they had known and the only kind of music they had heard.⁴⁹

During this era, King Tupou I was too busy stabilizing his power through wars, while Queen Salote stood in opposition to warfare. Although the queen did not know about God during the dark ages in the Pacific, she still acted like a mediator between the people and God's

⁴⁸ Gifford, *Tongan Society*, 207.

⁴⁹ Adrienne L. Kaeppler, "The Production and Reproduction of Social and Cultural Values in the Compositions of Queen Salote of Tonga," in *Music, Gender, and Culture*, ed. Marcia Herndon and Susanne Ziegler, 191-219 (Wilhemshaven, Ger.: Florian Noetzel, 1990), 191-219.

compassion, while also caring about the unjust treatment of women. Unlike other women, Queen Salote had the advantage of being able to voice her concerns on matters, more so than the average woman, because of her social status. From her high status in the community, she fought to free women from all the mistreatment and abuse they experienced from their husbands. She even helped them row the war canoes and continued to support them by intervening in their daily struggles. Since her husband had power over her, the queen made an incredibly wise decision by choosing the battles to fight in regard to the unjust treatment of women in the community. This act can be described as a compassionate movement toward others.

The Current True Value behind Tongan Culture

Tongan women continue to wear the kiekie, but with the same purpose as the men wearing the ta'ovala, and that is to show respect to the almighty God. This change was difficult at first because it was a new movement for the people of Tonga. The women had a hard time adjusting to the new sound of the church bell. They were used to hearing the *povai*, the bamboo stick, and the kele'a. It took a while for them to take in this new sound, because the sound of freedom and liberation was so different from the sounds of war and bloodshed.

However, this was how religious education and practical theology were developed in Tonga. In each church that was built, the nobles would first put the chief as the pastor of that church, and the pastor's primary task was to put God first before the king. The idea of the first fruits being given to the king was no longer the law of the land. Tongan people began giving their first fruits to the vulnerable, the elderly, and those who had a great need for the food.

Tongans did not have to give anything they did want to give. Later, the king anointed the first president of The Free Wesleyan Church of Tonga and selected the members of its conference.⁵⁰

The FWCT started a theological school in 1865 and it remains the only theological school in Tonga to this day. The people of Tonga are all Christian practitioners, and their adherence to Christianity is the foundation of religious education and spiritual formation in Tonga. The focus of the training for pastors is on serving people in Tonga and not necessarily in Tongan congregations in other parts of the world. Tongans were the first islanders in the Pacific to accept the God of the missionaries. King Tupou I sent his trained men across the Pacific Ocean to spread the gospel to all the islands in the Pacific. These men were the first Tongans to serve as practical theologians in Tonga, and they became the first missionaries to the islands around Tonga.⁵¹

The missionaries now focused on planting the gospel in the hearts of the people by relating it to their culture. Whatever clothes Tongans accepted from the missionaries, they would still wear the ta'ovala on top of those clothes. The people of Tonga still practice these cultural traditions today. Missionaries are no longer needed in Tonga, because the people have accepted the gospel and still practice it within the entire community. A few months after the Tuku Fonua (the giving of the land to God), the king established his government. The church belongs to the king, which means that the constitution and governmental laws are based on the Bible. The government's and the church's constitution are the same because of the way the Tongan people live.

⁵⁰ Gifford, *Tongan Society*, 102.

⁵¹ Gifford, *Tongan Society*, 181.

There are many stories within Tongan tradition that make Tongans proud and make them feel like Tongans. One of these is the story of the Tuku Fonua, when the king denied colonization and gave his land and people to be ruled by God. Another is the story of the late Queen Salote freeing Tongan women from slavery and providing Tongans with the Golden Bands as the core principles of their culture to wrap together with the ta'ovala. These same stories are personal to me and reflect my identity. These stories form the heart of the Tongan, which they hold onto tightly and never want to let go.⁵²

Chapter Conclusion

This chapter has shown that Tongans take pride in their culture. It did not matter to them what culture the missionaries brought. They would rather give up their lives then give up their culture. Peering into the history before Christianity arrived and witnessing how Tongans' faith and culture played big roles in their lives and identities shows how the God of the missionaries did not immediately fit in with the dominant culture. Yet Tongans refused to be colonized. This decision indicates that Tongans did not want to lose their heart, which is their culture. Of course, the values of their culture were true and important for their identities and lives.⁵³

This chapter focused on understanding the core values behind Tongan culture. Tongans have used these core values as the foundation of their religious education, spiritual formation, and practical theology. It is important to fully grasp the very essentials of these values to deeply appreciate the Tongan culture. These values have been carried through the hearts of Tongans throughout their lives and history.⁵⁴

⁵² Lātūkefu, *The Tongan Constitution*, 15.

⁵³ Lātūkefu, *The Tongan Constitution*, 15.

⁵⁴ Lātūkefu, *The Tongan Constitution*, 15.

In this chapter, I talked about how Christian missionaries introduced their culture together with the gospel and how that became incredibly challenging for Tongans. However, the king thought that Western parameters were going to be relevant to the social structure of his people. The introduction of Western views led to the Tongan ranking and hierarchy being connected with the church, with the king and the chiefs at the higher levels of the church and the people beneath them.⁵⁵ In 1845, the magnificent young warrior, strategist, and orator Taufa'ahau united Tonga into a more Western-style kingdom. He held the chiefly title of Tu'i Kanokupolu as the king and ruler of Tonga. He declared Tonga a constitutional monarchy, formally adopted Western royal styles, enshrined a code of law, introduced land tenure, and limited the power of the chiefs. He gave each family a plot of land of about eight acres or more, depending on the family size, and these lands were to be passed down to the eldest son, who is always the heir. The chief of each village holds power over and cares for the land that has not been distributed and gives a portion of that land to any newcomer.⁵⁶

As I have explained, the Tongan experience was rooted in seeing the trees as divine, as trees were the sources of food, medicine, clothing, and more. When the missionaries came, they taught the chiefs and the people of Tonga that all creation belongs to God. Since Tongans already had great respect for trees and nature, they developed an even greater appreciation of creation. This was the beginning of Tongan religious education. This new education was the beginning and the foundation of the changing of their hearts, beliefs, and mentalities toward something greater and more powerful, which is God. These changes occurred before the first church was established in Tonga.

⁵⁵ Lātūkefu, *The Tongan Constitution*, 15.

⁵⁶ Lātūkefu, *The Tongan Constitution*, 15.

I have also discussed how an act of compassion changed the whole picture of Tonga faith and culture and how this illustrates the importance of culture and religion within the Tongan community. Unlike other women, Queen Salote had the advantage of being able to voice her concerns in relation to the matter of how women were treated in Tonga. She tried to win over her husband's heart by going beyond the reef to suffer with the oppressor. From her high status in the community, she battled to free women from all the mistreatment and abusiveness of their husbands. She even helped them row the war canoes and continued to support them by intervening in their daily struggles.⁵⁷

It is important to acknowledge the spiritual transformation of Tongan women and how a compassionate movement eloquently illustrated the value of women within the community. Queen Salote's compassionate movement changed how Tongan men viewed women, from having no value within the community to having the value known as *fefine akonaki* (respected women). They went from wearing a *kahoa lou'akau* (leaf scarf) to wearing a *kahoa kula* (red cotton scarf), and from wearing a *kiekie lou'akau* (leaf waist wrapper) to wearing modern ta'ovala and kiekie. All this occurred from just one compassionate movement by one woman whose heart was filled with compassion toward others. The women of Tonga are now free and have found a new inner-self value and a way to unite with the God who liberated them.⁵⁸

Compassionate movement and restorative action can bring equality to the living, and this makes a big difference in the community. The practice of compassionate movement has brought a lot of spiritual reconciliation to the living. As a result of Queen Salote's actions, Tongans finally broke the ground of the hidden values behind their traditional cultural stories. After all,

⁵⁷ Tangikina, interview.

⁵⁸ Tangikina, interview.

knowing compassion is to respect, care for, and move with love for self and others, and compassion brings understanding of traditions, cultures, religions, and experiences.⁵⁹

After the Tongan people accepted Christianity, the messages of the gospel were received, and the hearts of the people were moved toward change. This chapter talked about how the first Christian church was established in 1885 and the significance of the sitting arrangement. The sitting arrangement of the kava ceremony has now become the sitting arrangement of every church in Tonga. But instead of the king or chief sitting at the front of the circle, the minister or whoever is preaching takes that position. In addition, no one can enter a church without wearing a ta'ovala because it is considered very disrespectful; wearing a ta'ovala shows respect toward God. The traditional idea of *polopolo* (giving one's first fruits to the king) is no longer in practice. The Tongan chiefs commanded the natives to give all the first fruits of their crops to the missionaries as a way of showing respect for God. Later, when Tongan ministers were appointed to the churches, the first fruits were given to them. More internal changes have been made, but they have all been positive transformations of Tongan hearts and minds. Religious education does not involve a change of culture. It is simply a process of changing hearts and minds toward worthy virtues.⁶⁰

Finally, in this chapter I discussed the Golden Bands that make up the kafa (wrapping rope) to tie the ta'ovala to the body of the Tongan. One of the ways that Tongans dealt with the issues of misuse of power and the abuse of women was that Queen Salote declared the Golden Bands the core values of their culture. The Golden Bands constitute the Tongan anga' ofa (loving nature) and consist of anga faka'apa'apa (reverence and respect), mamahi'i me'a (zeal and team

⁵⁹ Rogers, "Engaging the Powers."

⁶⁰ Gifford, *Tongan Society*, 102.

spirit for any worthy cause), tauhi vaha'a (keeping good relationships with one another), and lototo (willing heart and mind). These core cultural values ought to be practiced by Tongans as the core principles of their lives.

These traditions I have described are the cultural traditions of Tongans that they are holding on to tightly. Regardless of where they are in the world, Tongans will still practice these cultural traditions. The nature of the Tongan is their heart, as it contains the essence of the Golden Bands. Tongans also embody their cultural values physically, as seen in the dress code, the kava ceremony, and church practices. Today, they are losing these values, specifically the Golden Bands, but they still practice the outward aspects of their culture.

In the next chapter, I will discuss how these cultural traditions are still being practiced abroad but the values are nowhere to be found. The reason for this is that Tongans' hearts are too big to take overseas. Therefore, there is some confusion as to what happens when they move to another culture. They do not know how to merge into their new context, and the escalating issues they have are due to a poor understanding of Tongan values and how they are different from the values of the new culture. The first and second generations are not connected due to cultural differences. It seems that Tongans' history with white Christian missionaries is going to repeat itself if leaders do not immediately do something about these issues. Tongan leaders in other cultures need to learn about the cultural and generational differences and teach their people the values that touch their hearts and come from Tongan cultural traditions. These issues require an inner-self contextualization because it is a problem within their heart, understanding, perspectives, and experiences. The next chapter will take a look at how different cultures have affected the lives of Tongan people when dwelling overseas.

Chapter Three

Contemporary Issues in the United States

“Will our children have faith?” is the question posed in the title of John H. Westerhoff III’s well-known book. In this book, Westerhoff explores the idea that in his day, while some people were “paralyzed by discouragement, others [were] all too enthusiastically latching onto every new suggestion or idea.”¹

Chapter Introduction

The migration of Tongans overseas has resulted in more churches overseas than there are in Tonga. All churches abroad are facing the same cultural issues, such as poor understanding of the Tongan culture. They are still fishing for their Tongan hearts in the wrong place and time. They need to understand how to merge and integrate both cultures. The best way for the youth to understand their faith and culture is first from their own parents. But, if the parents are mixed up and if they do not really know the cultural values, how will they teach their children these important Tongan values?

Before school and church, the parents are usually the first and main teachers of the youth, no matter what culture they are raised in. No home is perfect, but fathers and mothers are the most influential people in the lives of their children. All youth have been raised in their respective homes by their parents. Proverbs 22:6 highlights a critical contribution of parents: “Train children in the right way, and when old, they will not stray” (NRSV).

¹ John H. Westerhoff III, *Will Our Children Have Faith?* (New York: Seabury Press, 1976), x.

With regards to the African proverb, “It takes a village to raise a child,” I would like to use a Tongan proverb: “Ko ‘e tau fanau ko e kaha’u ia ‘o e Siasi,” which means, “Our children are the future of our church.” Fathers, mothers, and grandparents are those who can consistently teach children to know the doctrines of their faith and who can effortlessly provide understanding of cultural values. It all starts at home, and if the fathers and mothers are true to their faith and culture, the children will grow up to be good leaders of the church and community. This is the hope that Tongans have for their youth, so they may be able to withstand the temptations of going astray and become good leaders for their people.²

The life of a young Tongan involves a very communal lifestyle, which means everyone is involved in the transformative process of the youth’s life. The process of raising a Tongan youth includes all church and community leaders. Tongans trying to transpose their culture to the US in the same way the missionaries did in Tonga need to know how to blend in with American culture. How will they be able to do that? They need educated leaders to lead them, but who is willing to step up and teach the youth the merging process of the future? The first thing is to contextualize and understand their life here in America, before providing solutions to the problems, which I will do in the next chapter.³

In the previous chapter, an examination of the way missionaries brought the gospel and Western culture together and tried to force both things into the Tongan soil indicated that was not the best method for spreading the gospel. The people in Tonga refused the Western culture, but they were willing to integrate the gospel into their culture. Tongans were able to merge the

² Talaiasi Taufa (FWCT lay leader, Los Angeles, CA), interview by the author, July 14, 2020.

³ Taufa, interview, July 14, 2020.

gospel with their culture very well. The outcome of this movement brought the people a new perception of their culture and faith, and this became the foundation of the religious and cultural development in Tonga. The Tongan people took these perceptions and planted the seeds of the gospel within their hearts. In this chapter, instead of focusing on life in Tonga, the focus will be on the experiences of Tongans living on American soil and the issues that arise with Tongans in the US. Readers will follow Tongans migrating to the US, and then we will look at the significance of their Tongan culture and why they are willing to practice their culture abroad. This chapter will also look at the issues with leaders and youth in Tongan communities and provide some case studies of Tongan congregations and communities abroad. Although there are several things to talk about, the focus of this chapter will be the youth as the most vulnerable victims of the generational clash and differences.

Section One: Migrating to America

The Significance of Tongan Cultural Values

The first part of this section focuses on the heart of the Tongan culture, which is their loving nature that is contained in the four values of the Golden Bands. These core values explain why the Tongan culture is so unique and hard to erase from Tongans' hearts. It will also provide information related to how they honor these core values through their cultural attire and way of physical embodiment of these values through the kava ceremony. This is the very culture that refused to change during the time of the missionaries coming to Tonga. Today, Tongans are refusing to let go of traditional Tongan cultural values when they move to the US. This has become an issue for Tongans living abroad, because they do not understand the mixture of cultures that exist in the United States and other countries.

The Kavei Koula: The Four Pillars of Tongan Virtue

Anga' ofa: The Tongan compassionate nature. Tonga has class differences that illustrate how those living in Tonga were formed; as explained previously, the chief and the king's royal family were at the top of the hierarchy. When the Tongans were known as barbarians, the king and the chiefs benefited from what the people harvested from the sea and their crops. Today, the people benefit from their achievements, but they still offer and share their harvests with the village chief to show respect. The chief always shares with the king out of respect and appreciation. Tongans have a natural inclination to serve with their best in everything they do and not expect anything in return.

In ancient times, these offerings were called *'inasi*, because the people were expected to give their first fruits to the king. Since then, the name for these offerings has been changed to *katoanga polopolo*, and they still serve the same function as the *'inasi*, but it is now a choice whether to give them or not and to whom you desire. For those that do give, it is because their heart is willing to do so. *Katoanga* means “occasion,” and *polopolo* means “an offering of the first and best crops to whomever that the giver wishes.” It is no longer necessary to be the king or the chief to receive these benefits. People now give to the vulnerable, neighbors, and the elderly. The best of all is that the farmers allow the people to freely harvest what is left after the *polopolo* has been given. The people who take advantage of the farmer's offer fill up their kitchen in the long run to meet their needs. People are also willing to share what they receive with their neighbors.

Anga faka'apa'apa (reverence and respect). The family structure in a Tongan family is like any other family structure in the world. Families are made up of parents, children, siblings, and grandparents. However, some additional virtues have highlighted the uniqueness of the

Tongan family, and one of them is anga faka'apa'apa. This section will discuss applying the anga faka'apa'apa into the Tongan family structure. Families in Tonga are divided into two lines: the open line or the mother's side of the family, and the taboo line, which is the father's side of the family. On the father's side, the children are not allowed to eat their father's leftover food, and they are not allowed to sleep in his bed, wear his clothing, or even enter his room. Tongan traditions say that the women on the father's side of the family hold greater authority than and are superior to the women on the mother's side of the family. A *fahu*, who is the father's oldest sister, will be treated with the highest levels of respect at all formal and informal occasions, like funerals, weddings, and births. "She acts as the family matriarch and oversees her siblings, nieces, and nephews."⁴

Another unique Tongan family value is that there is no such thing as first or second cousins. All first, second, third, and fourth cousins are considered brothers and sisters. In most situations, if a child needs something from his or her family, they will ask their mother's side of the family. If you must ask your father's side of the family for something, then you must follow a traditional cultural process. The person asking must wear a formal ta'ovala and dress up in very respectful attire before approaching family members with the request. However, when it comes to applying anga faka'apa'apa within each family, it is taboo for the children to talk back to their parents at any time. Children need to sit and listen to their parents regardless of their parents being right or wrong, and the children must listen without talking back or arguing. Tongans believe speaking to their parents with respect is the only way to treat them, and that blessings are bestowed upon the children from the parents or elders that are speaking to them. Tongans do not

⁴ "Tonga—People & Culture." See also Gifford, *Tongan Society*, 22.

believe in children or family members having freedom of speech or human rights when it comes to family conflict. The father or elder who is leading an occasion is the speaker of the family, and everyone else is expected to only listen while the father or elder speaks. Thus, this way of *anga faka'apa'apa* is not only applied within the family system, but in schools and other institutions in Tonga.

There are many other cultural norms and traditions that Tongans follow. For instance, it is taboo for brothers and sisters to share a room or watch a movie together. Brothers and sisters are not allowed to swear in front of each other, and children should not swear at all. The youth are not allowed walk in front of an elder and they must walk behind their backs. The youth must also say “*tulou*” to their elders, bowing their head a little; *tulou* means “excuse me.” In these modern days, there is not much change in these cultural traditions and norms, because this is what makes Tongans unique. These are the true and deep values of their cultural identity. The structures and foundations of a Tongan family have been embodied and passed down for generations, and there is hope that they will continue to be passed down. In the Tongan culture, the family is a safe space and place.

Tauhi vaha'a (keeping good relations with one another). In modern days, the experience in Tonga is embedded in living in a communal way of life. What this means is that Tongans make their decisions based on their love for one another. This loving nature plays a huge role in the lives of Tongans when it comes to keeping a good relationship with everyone. An example of *tauhi vaha'a* is the funeral. If someone dies in a village, everyone will wear black clothing, regardless of if they are related to the family of the deceased.⁵ That is how they embody an

⁵ “Tonga—People & Culture.”

excellent relationship with each other in a group or village. This is not just about keeping that connection, but about empathy and a compassionate movement toward others. It is about the heart that is ruled by love. Thus, if they do not wear black to a funeral, they would not be feeling right about that choice. They know from experience that love in the fullest sense involves a sympathetic response to the loved one and sharing joys and grief with one another.

The impact of living out tauhi vaha'a lies in the people's willingness to step into the world and to let their feelings and imagination be directed by the context that they are in. That is to say, people step into the projected narrative world of the Tongan people and become part of the concerns within that world. Hence, they experience a transformation in their feelings and attitudes about the broader world at a level that might not be reached with awareness alone, but through action as a principle of life. Keep in mind, as Frank Rogers asserts, "Compassion for others can also be sophisticated. When we are not open to a compassionate connection with someone—when we are feeling reactive, dismissive, frightened, overwhelmed, or even simply numb and distracted—an interior movement holds us in its grasp."⁶

Mamahi'i me'a (zeal and team spirit for any worthy cause). One of the cultural traditions that is kept and practiced by Tongans is the traditional *faiva fakatonga* (Tongan dance).⁷ The *faiva* is part of all Tongan events. This *faiva* is how the Tongans acknowledge their happiness, their joy, and their thanksgiving with everyone in the group. Different cultures interpret and embody celebration in many ways, including different ways of dancing and other forms of cultural performance. Tongans have an additional insight into the festival. The Tongan people

⁶ Rogers, "Orientation to the Course."

⁷ Videos of the *faiva fakatonga* can easily be found on YouTube.

partake in the event as one; the faiva comes with the event as part of it. This spiritual state of the faiva is how Tongans feel the presence of love toward a worthy cause.

In a village, the most significant celebratory occasions are weddings and birthdays. When these occasions occur in a family, the rest of the families in that village will bring gifts like food, money, and whatever they want to in order show their respect to that family. The family prepares a big feast to feed the people when they come to the event. People in the village will bring their gifts a day or a week before the occasion begins to help the family prepare for the feast. While the village is waiting for the day of celebration, the chief or an elderly person in the village will bring the youth in the village together to prepare songs, dances, and performances. They will be ready to accommodate this joyous occasion to the best of their ability. Tongan people love to sing, they love to perform traditional dances, and they love to be a part of any celebration. The idea behind the celebration is that if someone is Tongan, then they are family, and the celebration is theirs as well. The best thing about mamahi'i me'a is that everyone is welcomed to these events. Tongans love to work together for any worthy cause.

Lototo (ready and willing heart and mind). Lototo is the Tongan perspective of caring for the elderly and the disabled. One of the Tongan experiences is rooted in believing that caring for the elderly and the disabled is a duty and responsibility for each family. Tongan culture does not allow the government to have a facility or home for the elderly and the disabled. Tongan people believe that if a family has a disabled family member or an elderly person in their home then that family will care for and love them until they die. It is considered impolite in the Tongan culture to pay or have someone else take care of the elderly in one's family or to look after family members with disabilities.

The reason why the Tongans believe in this way is because of blessings. Tongan people believe things happen the way they do and for a reason. It is human nature: the purpose for a person is to be born, grow up, and get old in a family, so it is the responsibility of each family to take care of its elderly or disabled. Tongans believe that caring for the elderly or the disabled is how a family receives blessings, regardless of their situation. If they have someone else care for their elderly or their disabled family member, then the blessings will go toward and remain with that caregiver and not the family. The blessings received by the family are in the form of wisdom, family harmony, and a future of peace and prosperity.

The Dress Code

The ta'ovala is the original clothing of the Tongan people, and this is what they wore when they approached the king to show their respect for their leader, who was thought to be the ruler of nature. As I said in chapter two, the ta'ovala was made of tree leaves that were sewn together and then wrapped around the waist to show that the person wearing them belonged to the king. At night, the ta'ovala was laid out underneath the leaf mat (*fala*) to keep it from crumbling, which was an act of respect for the trees the leaves came from. When Tongan people woke up in the morning, they would remove the ta'ovala from underneath the mat and wrap it around their waist to show their respect for nature and their king. The idea of the ta'ovala was rooted in the thinking and beliefs of the Tongan people in ancient times. However, the ta'ovala is only for men and married women to wear.⁸

Young Tongan women would wear a leaf waist wrapper called a *kiekie*. The kiekie is made from the same materials as the ta'ovala but with different designs. These designs were put

⁸ Free Wesleyan Church of Tonga, "Tohi mahina" [Monthly article], #32 (Nuku'alofa, Tonga: Tonga Press, 1975).

together just for women. The difference between the ta'ovala and the kiekie is that they are worn for a specific purpose. The kiekie is very similar to the ta'ovala, but it can only be worn by young women. Today, the kiekie represents the new feminine Tongan self that bonds with nature, and it also means that by wrapping the kiekie around the waist, the young girl is faithful and has yet to give herself to a man.⁹

It can be difficult for cultures and religions to understand each other because of the different values and meanings behind their traditions and actions. For instance, wearing the kiekie is a pathway from one stage to another and represents a young woman going from being single to being married. It is a pathway that cannot be explained through words nor shown through symbolic acts, but is a spiritual experience that offers a young woman passion for maturity. Wearing the kiekie leads into a completely different stage of body and spirit in a Tongan woman's life.¹⁰

Wearing the kiekie is not based on religious practices, but it is part of a cultural tradition that has a different meaning depending on who is wearing it. In Tonga today, young women are still wearing the kiekie. The ta'ovala and kiekie are Tongan traditions that are still practiced today in the Tongan community. Wearing these symbolic elements is a part of showing their respect for nature and their culture. Tongans wear them when attending weddings and other Tongan occasions around the world. This is why Tongans refused to wear what was introduced by the sailors and missionaries, because the long coat and hats introduced were not part of Tongan culture and were considered impolite and disrespectful. That being said, even with Tongan traditions, people still need to respect each other's cultures and traditions, not only

⁹ Free Wesleyan Church of Tonga, "Tohi mahina," #32.

¹⁰ Hauloto He'ofa, interview by the author, Hawthorne, CA, November 4, 2020.

because they have different values and meanings, but because people are all part of the human family.¹¹

The Kava Ceremony

In the kava ceremony, the king's messages and rules are given to the chiefs and the communities' leaders. The youth are allowed to participate in their church's and village's kava ceremonies. This practice can save young adults from the trouble that alcohol and drugs may cause. The kava ceremony is where a lot of dialog takes place amongst the men of the community about their history. This practice is where the youth can listen and learn the true values of their culture. It is how most cultural issues are resolved.

The Leadership in Crisis

In the late 1960s, the king of Tonga, Taufa'ahau Tupou IV, traveled to foreign countries trying to open doors of opportunity for the Tongan people to travel overseas. It was like rain on dry land for his people. When the opportunity was granted, the people began to save up money to take full advantage of this opportunity. Tongans now had an opportunity to further their education, find better jobs, and experience the world outside of Tonga.¹²

In the late 1970s and early 1980s, Tongans began to travel overseas to places like New Zealand, Australia, and the US. When they settled into the place of their choice and found a roof over their heads, the next thing Tongans did was look for a church to attend, even before they thought about looking for work. The reason for looking for a church before work is that the people of Tonga are church-going people, and Christians before anything else. Tongan

¹¹ Siosiu Kanongata'a (Minister of Education for Women's Affairs and Culture), interview by the author, August 12, 2017.

¹² Kanongata'a, interview.

immigrants were advised by the church leaders back in Tonga to find shelter under two denominations, which were the Methodist church and the Catholic Church. When living abroad, Tongans took this advice from their church leaders.¹³

During this time, the church setting was a challenge for them. A lot of things changed for Tongans living in unfamiliar places, and they did not feel at home in their new churches due to their atmospheres and decorations. Tongans are used to seeing *tapa* (Tongan mats) and are used to the sitting arrangement that they were accustomed to in their churches back home in Tonga. They were not comfortable worshipping together with people wearing Western clothing, like long pants and hats. These new environments were an uncomfortable situation for Tongans because they did not fit their cultural traditions. After a few years, the majority of Tongans believed that they had built strong enough communities abroad to worship the Tongan way.¹⁴

As the Tongans grew in numbers, the first-generation Tongan immigrants realized that the second generation Tongan Americans were more American than Tongan, because they were born and educated in America. The second generation also was influenced heavily by American culture and the programs in The United Methodist Church were all conducted in English. The Tongan immigrant population in America decided to split off from the Methodist church and start their own Wesleyan Church due to these cultural issues. Tongan church members would gather in garages, living rooms, and other areas to begin this new movement with the Wesleyan Church. In the early 1990s, the Wesleyan Church was registered as an official church in four

¹³ Vatuniloka Fangupo (First Tongan UMC lay leader), conversation with the author, November 2013.

¹⁴ Fangupo, conversation.

states: Arizona, California, Texas, and Utah, and the Tongan conference started providing these churches with pastors from Tonga to lead them spiritually.¹⁵

Issues with the Concept of Tongan Practical Theology

This dissertation's problem statement was that there is a poor understanding of cultural values among the Tongan people in general. This root problem has created more issues and has resulted in more cultural differences among Tongan generations. To gain a better understanding of the problem, I am going to begin by exploring the issue from my perspective as a Tongan pastor and then look at the issue from the perspective of Tongan leaders and youth.

Trying to find one definition of practical theology (PT) is a daunting task because of the different ways in which PT can be understood. Whether people look at it as a set of skills, as an accumulation of knowledge, or as spiritual intervention, it creates a complex set of concepts and possibilities, any one of which could be emphasized. Knowing and understanding the tasks of practical theology enables people to complete theological reflection on their own social location and develop scholarship from an intersectional perspective. Therefore, for the benefit of this research, my focus will be on my personal context as a Tongan pastor and how PT relates to me personally and to those in my community.

There are three core steps of PT in Tonga that all Tongan pastors from Tonga serving overseas abide by. However, in chapter five of this dissertation, I will explore how the IFS model can provide a new practical theological lens for Tongan pastors when serving abroad.

First, PT in the Tongan context cannot be understood unless we first consider how PT was introduced to Tonga. Tongan PT was influenced by the teachings of the Western

¹⁵ Havili Mone (former pastor of the UMC), conversation with the author, June 2016.

missionaries, who emphasized conversion and the infallibility of the Bible. Remembering that the gospel was introduced to the Tongan people less than two hundred years ago gives some indication of the relative novelty of PT as a concept. The theological lens through which Tongans were introduced to the Christian God was that God is a God of power who passes judgment and is omnipresent. In addition, God was to be related to and worshipped through reverence, awe, and, in some cases, fear. Therefore, PT was initially observed as a sacred activity that was not to be taken lightly or easily changed, but rather demanded conformity.¹⁶

Second, since the church and the state are not separate for Tongans, PT for Tongan pastors and leaders is determined by the doctrines and constitution of the church. Regardless of social location, it is the responsibility of the pastor to uphold these doctrines and constitution, which are approved by the church. For a pastor or leader to diverge from the institutional parameters of PT would result in reappointment or dismissal. Therefore, pastors who serve congregations outside of Tonga find themselves in difficult situations of trying to compromise conservative and liberal or other relevant contextual views. Thus, there is a need to go beyond the church of Tonga to find a liberation stage and transformative spiritual practices.

Third, viewing PT as a relational action with God means an act of service or sacrifice for most Tongans. As was pointed out in one of Dr. Samuel Lee's handouts, "Theology is the formation of God-consciousness; we do theology and theology forms us."¹⁷ The concept of the "suffering servant" best defines how laypersons perceive the manifestation of PT and how they should relate toward God. The submissive role of laypersons is perpetuated by socialization

¹⁶ Rev. Wesley Taotua (Samoan PhD student at CST), interview by the author, April 12, 2021.

¹⁷ K. Samuel Lee, "Research in Practical Theology," Practical Theology (class handout, Claremont School of Theology, Claremont, CA, September 22, 2019).

norms, which highlight humility and obedience as a moral necessity in communal and Christian living. PT is not normally discussed or interpreted by laypersons, as it is a clergy initiative with biblical authority. Ultimately, the Deuteronomist formula is adopted by laypersons, where their service and sacrifice to God is a pathway to blessings, while deviating from the chosen path leads to a curse.

The best way to overcome cultural barriers is to educate the ministers in Tonga and provide them with knowledge and awareness of how to serve abroad. This means that there is a need for the Tongan Theological College to step beyond their conservative and exclusivist curriculum to a more inclusive approach. The problem with sending abroad ministers who were trained in Tonga, trained to only work in Tonga, and who have only worked in Tonga is they will generally take the side of Tongan immigrants. There is a need for experienced ministers who can teach and educate both first-generation and later generation Tongans in a way that helps them find a common ground.

Secondly, it is important for Tongans to contextualize their minds and hearts and see the world more inclusively. They do not need to see Jesus wearing the ta'ovala all the time. They do not have to wear the ta'ovala to church. They need to wear the Golden Bands in their hearts and embody them through their actions. It is important to show the community one's Tongan heritage by representing the golden values of tauhi vaha'a, mamahi'i me'a, anga faka'apa'apa, and lototo, so one can become a part of one's community or church. This is how to overcome cultural barriers here in the US, but people need leaders to step up to teach and let the people know the significant core virtues of our culture. The problem here is due to cultural misunderstanding. Tongans are calling for assistance, because various issues are happening now with the Tongan youth who have left the church. Some of them are now in street gangs or some

are even in prison for life. They thought they were representing their true Tongan culture and identity of being a warrior. The youth need to know their culture at its deepest level to understand the core values behind it.

Issues with Tongan Leaders

Tongans are migrating overseas, and they are taking their cultural elements with them. Instead of them trying to blend in with US culture, they want to plant their Tongan culture in American soil. It seems that history is repeating itself. Americans do not care if people practice their own cultures, but there is a conflict of cultures within the second generation of Tongans living in the US. Experienced leaders are needed to lead the churches and Tongan community in a way that the second generation can understand and be aware of these matters. The Tongan people respect and listen to their ministers in Tonga as part of their culture. The members of the second generation of Tongans living in the US are not familiar with this culture and are likely to reject the minister. However, if the ministers know how to deal and work with the differences in context, then they may offer a solution to the problem.

A major issue with leaders that needs to be defined is what is the true nature and purpose of the minister? One might critique the possible downfalls of ministers, but unless there is a sound foundation on which to reconstruct their roles, they will continue to fall short of their potential. For this reason, two attributes have been selected to provide more understanding toward revitalizing the role of the minister.

Stewardship. Truly, Jesus likens children to the kingdom of heaven. His disciples were trying to push the children away, but Jesus said, “Let the little children come to me” (Mark 10:14, NRSV). This passage is surely teaching people about their duty as disciples to bring the children to Christ and care for them. This duty was given by God in the beginning to be stewards

over all of His creations, including the children (Genesis 1:28, 2:15). Being a disciple of Christ is not only knowing Him, but believing in Him, and living according to His teachings. People need to walk the walk in order to become good shepherds and to know people; they need to show good stewardship, care for people, and be a good servant to others.

The Bible acknowledges that Jesus ate with the Gentiles and treated everyone equally. The Pharisees and the Sadducees commanded the Gentiles to abide by their laws in order to become Jews or Christians. Paul disagreed, saying that it is not necessary to be circumcised to be a Christian; all that is needed is for people to accept Christ into their hearts (Galatians 5:2-6). Therefore, one might determine that it is not necessary to focus on Tongan religious traditions, but to only accept Christ. People need to also consider others because people are all equal in the eyes of God. People do not have to be Tongan to go to heaven. Jesus is the way, the truth, and the life (John 14:6).

Leadership. According to James Kouzes and Barry Posner in *The Leadership Challenge*, “Leadership is not about position or title. It is not about organizational power or authority. It is not about fame or wealth. It is not about being a hero. Leadership is about relationship, about credibility, and about what you do.”¹⁸ This quote points to the ethical issues that existed with the leadership of the missionaries and the Tongan leaders. The London Missionary Society was focused on civilization as a way of Christianizing people by taking what the Tongans valued in exchange for Western clothes, ties, and shoes. The Australian missionaries targeted the chiefs with power by giving them cologne and umbrellas in exchange for slaves to work for them.¹⁹

¹⁸ James M. Kouzes and Barry Z. Posner, *The Leadership Challenge*, 5th ed. (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2012), 329.

¹⁹ Lātūkefu, *The Tongan Constitution*, 16.

The outcome of one's leadership duty can sometime define who they are, what their strengths and weaknesses are, and what they desire. There is a distinction between a leadership position and the role of a leader. A leadership position is an open seat which a worthy person is called or chosen to fill. If the chosen person's vision is to sit on that seat, they must sacrifice their life to earn the position. The problem is the person does not realize the tasks of the leader due to the overwhelming glory of holding the position. The notion of being called to serve no longer exists, and the leader is no longer part of the community.

Knowing a leadership task is to understand what it means to be both a leader and a servant. Leaders who have this understanding know they are not serving the leadership position, but whom they are called to serve. When leaders have this proper understanding, followers will have faith in their leaders, and they will both be influenced by the other. Leadership is a very noble task, and one must serve in a very noble way to create a very noble team in any circumstance. It is important to know that the number one leadership task is to be a servant. That is how a great, faithful community is created and that is how the culture is identified and transmitted.

It seems that the contextualization of the gospel and the religious leadership was built as a system of power used by the colonizer to colonize people and places. It was never a pure gospel. It was utilized to colonize both the people and their land. The system worked and places were colonized.²⁰ The gospel was a powerful tool, but what was behind it? Was it racism, classism, sexism, or other things? What can people do about this situation? History cannot

²⁰ Jens Poulsen, *Early Tongan Prehistory*, vol. 1, *The Lapita Period on Tongatapu and Its Relationships* (Canberra, Australia: Department of Prehistory, Research School of Pacific Studies, Australian National University, 1987), 274.

answer for the problems of today, but people can do something about the future. People can learn from history and develop theology according to the will of God. Undoubtedly, by not doing so, history will not only continue to repeat itself, but the Tongan people will always face the same conflicts in churches overseas. By Tongans learning their history, the Tongan culture, faith, and identity and the context of the country in which they worship will be able to provide a more relevant message. The crises in Tongan churches are calling for the leadership of Tongan churches to pay attention to the Tongan community today. Leaders ought to be faithful to the people that God has called them to lead.

Section Two: The Reef of Today is the Island of Tomorrow

Tongans in the United States are a mix of two cultures: that of the Tongan immigrant (first generation) and that of the Tongan American (second generation). They have one major relationship in common that they identify themselves with, and that is their culture as lotu (praying) people. The people who belong to God and show faithfulness by praying together in a church are all connected. As mentioned, when a Tongan plants their roots in a new setting or location, the very first thing they do is look for a church to attend. Why? Because they are lotu people.²¹

Language

Less than ten percent of Wesleyan youth can partially understand the Tongan language, and no more than five percent can speak to it fluently.²² A common problem for the Wesleyan youth is that they have a lack of understanding of their own language. Parents do not make the

²¹ Helen Morton, *Becoming Tongan, An Ethnography of Childhood* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1996), 14.

²² Tevita Faka'osi Folau (youth leader in Salt Lake City), interview by the author, September 28, 2017.

effort to teach the Tongan language in their homes. This becomes a problem for the youth when they interact within a church community. However, all the church services are given from beginning to end in the Tongan language, so from the beginning to the end of each service the youth learn nothing.²³

A famous quote by Nelson Mandela states, “If you talk to a man in a language he understands, that goes to his head. If you talk to him in his own language; it goes to his heart.” In addition, if a Tongan immigrant pupil were to be spoken to in the English language, it would not have the same effect as if the Tongan immigrant were to be spoken to in their own native language.²⁴

When the youth read the Tongan Holy Bible, they should understand it more than the English Bible. The Tongan language should have more depth in its words and have more of an effect. Even if the youth speak Tongan and English fluently, the Tongan language is their core language, and it will certainly go to their hearts. The youth need to be able to communicate, understand and speak in their native language so they can communicate with their parents and family if do not speak the English language.²⁵

When someone is in an environment different from their own, they tend to adapt and quickly pick up the traditions and way of life of that new culture in order to better fit in with that new culture. However, these new cultural changes can also enable one culture to overlap or have more impact on one’s life than the other. The youth are positioned in a Western cultural context. Their Tongan culture seems only to exist when events occur like birthdays, weddings, and

²³ Hauloto Oko (head Sunday school teacher of the FWCT), interview by the author, April 21, 2021.

²⁴ Hauloto Oko, interview.

²⁵ Henrieta Fonua (FWCT youth director), interview by the author, August 22, 2020.

funerals. However, outside of their homes it is likely that they completely leave their Tongan uniforms and identity and wear their modern American clothing and take on that identity. The Wesleyan youth are hesitant and quite unsure of their cultural backgrounds.²⁶

Dress Code

Throughout the years, Tongan immigrants have raised their families in the United States, introducing them to both the Tongan and American cultures since birth. They gave birth to a generation of Tongan Americans who to this day struggle to find their true identities. Tongans born and raised in Tonga perceive Tongan Americans to not be true Tongans and frown upon them and their American-infused upbringing. This conflict is causing many Tongan Christians in America to split up. For instance, Tongans traditionally or customarily wear a *ta'ovala* and a *tupenu* (sarong) when going to church, whereas the Americans wear semi-formal or semi-casual dresses and suits. Most Tongans from Tonga choose to continue to wear the cultural attire to church, whereas many Tongan Americans are more inclined to dress as Americans do to church.²⁷

The conflict here is not related to the gospel message at all yet many Tongan American Christians are against each other because of it. This conflict is merely a clash of cultures and cultural misunderstandings. When people allow themselves to be controlled and lead by anything outside of the gospel, they find themselves in a mess. God made each person unique, which is why this world is so diverse, but the power of the gospel is what brings people together as one.²⁸

²⁶ Sinalelea Siulolovao (former youth group member in Sia'atoutai, Tongatapu), interview by the author, September 28, 2020.

²⁷ Siulolovao, interview.

²⁸ Folau, interview.

Youth Participation

The Wesleyan church consists of programs that are formulated with the intention of teaching the youth in a youth-friendly environment. As mentioned, the services that are held on Sunday are the only day that youth would attend. The way the services are held during that day are in the same formal traditional way of worship as the church in Tonga. Everything in the service is in the native Tongan language. Even though everything may seem normal to the adults who understand, most of the youth are usually on their cell phones.²⁹

At every youth function day, all the youth would come together and enjoy their time together. The head director and assistant director along with the youth leaders decide what to do in the programs. These leaders decide who will complete the speeches and the place and time for these programs. The funding is usually raised by car washes, concerts, or through volunteer service. These programs are well planned out and are a team effort. Parents, members of the church, relatives, and friends usually come together during these programs to enjoy these moments together with the youth.³⁰

These activities and programs may have a way of piquing the interest of the youth, but the youth are still left without solid understanding their faith. There are no systematic teachings or regular teachings focused on understanding their Tongan identity and culture for the youth. Bible study is held two or three times a month, but is attended by very few members of the youth.³¹

²⁹ Folau, interview.

³⁰ Folau, interview.

³¹ Folau, interview.

Case Study: Tongan Youth

The case study for the Tongan youth showed, Firstly, Tongan immigrants wanted their children to abide by Tongan traditions and culture. Secondly, the second-generation youth spoke mainly English and were raised in a different context where they were unaware of the values behind their culture. Thirdly, all leaders and pastors appointed to serve in America by their conference had a poor understanding of how to serve in a different context. These leaders had little to no experience and familiarity with their new environment, so it became a problem with the Tongan Americans. Lastly, youth were leaving the Tongan church for other churches that offered youth programs they understood, causing some youth to completely change to another faith.

Consequently, the second generation grew up and started to question their parents about their cultural traditions. Why do they have to wear a ta'ovala to church? The only answer they would give their children is what they knew, which is to show respect. The children were confused, why cannot they show respect wearing long pants in the American fashion? What was the difference between Tongan and American clothing when it comes to church and worship? Another issue was the language, and it became a major communication problem between Tongan parents and children. The Tongan immigrants wanted to do everything in the Tongan language, including church. They wanted to see Jesus wearing a ta'ovala. They did not know how to merge their Tongan culture with the American culture. However, this cultural difference caused a split between the Tongan immigrants and Tongan Americans. The Tongan Americans moved back to

the Methodist church because their program is taught in English, which is a language they understand better.³²

The Tongan church consists of programs that are formulated with the intention of creating a youth friendly environment. The services that are held on Sundays get the highest number of youth to attend. The ways the services are held during that day are in the same formal traditional way of worship as the churches are in Tonga. Everything in the service is in the native Tongan language. Although the Tongan adults understood what was being preached, the majority of the youth were confused and there was only a small minority of youth that understood what was being said.³³

Tongan was the first language spoken at home and English was not introduced into the home until the children started attending school. Parents encourage their children to learn English while at school, but strictly use Tongan as the primary language within the home. Parents often believed that being bilingual would allow their children to embrace both Tongan and American cultures. One of the benefits of this was being able to understand everything that was going on during church services. Unfortunately, most of the youth did not listen to the teachings and considered this time to take a nap, look at their phones, or play tic-tac-toe.³⁴

Sunday school is usually held before or after Sunday services and it is usually led by youth leaders or voluntary parents. During Sunday school, participants would hear and talk about the passage readings for that day or a story from the Bible. The chosen lesson would be read and discussed among the group. The lesson was typically taught in English unless the teacher

³² Havea Palu (youth leader, FWCT of Los Angeles), interview by the author, May 29, 2019.

³³ Palu, interview.

³⁴ Hauloto Oko, interview.

decided to teach in Tongan for a particular lesson. The teachers would often have students repeat, “*koe tolu koe taha pe*” (“three in One”). Then the teachers would ask, “*Ko fe ‘a e ‘Otua?*” (“Where is God?”) The students would answer, “*Potu kotoa pe*” (“Everywhere”). Although the youth would repeat after the teacher and answer the teacher’s questions, it was only because it was taught to them as something to repeat or say.³⁵

Furthermore, on some Wednesdays, the services held that day is up to the youth to lead the entire program with speeches, singing, and action songs or skits. On these rare occasions, the youth would participate in sharing the gospel, giving testimonies, and expressing their spiritual status to the congregation in the English language. These are spiritually uplifting times for the youth and makes them desire to be involved with the services. This program was not consistent, but it was an opportunity for the youth and church leaders grow closer together. A few weeks after the youth would lead the service, the church services would return to its original state. The sermons would return to being preached in the Tongan language and the youth would return to their nap time during the sermons.³⁶

Although these programs may be active and well planned out, there seems to still be an increase in youth converting to other non-Tongan churches. These activities and programs may have the ability to pique the interest of the youth, but they are still leaving due to not understanding their faith and culture. There are no systematic teachings and regular teachings on the Tongan identity or culture within the church.³⁷

³⁵ Hauloto Oko, interview.

³⁶ Hauloto Oko, interview.

³⁷ Hauloto Oko, interview.

Communities

One of the most important interreligious events is the quarterly meetings undertaken by the American Community of Tonga, which brings together Tongan leaders from various faith traditions. The religions represented usually include Baha'i, the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Jehovah's Witnesses, Hinduism, Islam, and Christianity. The leaders gather each quarter to have an interreligious rally. While they do have a document that explains the elements of the rally, it changes for each meeting as the different meetings are hosted by the different groups; it is also written in Tongan.

This movement focuses on primarily the safety of the youth and places a priority on the Tongan community through respect for each other above any type of religious differences. The focus of the practice is not on converting, but on recognizing each other's common cultural identity and humanity, despite religious differences. This especially focuses on helping Tongans get along with one another, so that the youth can be friends with one another instead of being violent toward one another. Tongans believe that in order to help the greater community outside of themselves and other cultures, they need to take care of their own communities and to make sure they have the skills and knowledge to blend well with other cultures. There is no way to reconcile all these religious differences under one common group, but instead they should focus on finding unity through their diversity. The goal should never be on converting one another to their religious beliefs, but to help each other to recognize the importance of each other's religions. In all churches and communities, people need well-trained ministers and leaders for the ministerial world of the twenty-first century.

Chapter Conclusion

What has been introduced here is the crisis occurring in using traditional and cultural

contextualization in studying faith in another context. People need to show respect for others despite their differences. They can use their own beliefs in this process as all are just as worthy or unworthy in God's eyes. No people are better than others. All people become lost at some point, but God's love is available for all to be able to return to the path. People must move away from paternalism, hegemony, ethnocentrism, and racism by practicing a love that breaks down barriers in religion and within communities. They must be willing to suffer and accept the culture of the ones they are called to serve.

These images of crisis are calling for the attention of leadership today. People ought to be faithful to their tasks as leaders and be faithful to the people that God calls them to lead. Personally, taking the time to consider potential conflicts in leadership can help me avoid repeating past mistakes. Presently, my goal is to work with other Tongan leaders in the United States, regardless of the differences in leadership that may exist, to create leadership and training programs focused on creating unity instead of discord.

Chapter Four

The Tongan Foundational Net for Fishing in the Ocean of the Unknown

We need to assist in the restoration of our own lives. We do not rely on God alone to liberate us, but we need to act as a partner with God.

— Cyris H. S. Moon, “A Korean Minjung Perspective”

Chapter Introduction

Throughout history, men and women practiced theology for different purposes and motivations. From the people’s different histories and stories in the Bible, God has created humans in different colors, placed them in different places and they each serve different purposes. From that sense, people imagine the world differently because of their experiences and traditional backgrounds. Because they come from different circumstances, they always have distinctive perspectives when it comes to the field of hermeneutical interpretations, meanings and beyond. To discover some common ground through the existing diversities and to find unity people must first know who they are. People need to know their full selves and contextualize themselves into appreciating and understanding their full selves before understanding others at any considerable level.

Inner-self contextualization is similar, but different from cultural contextualization, but it does not contextualize the Bible’s culture from using people's different cultures and understandings. It is to contextualize the values behind different cultures and insights into the heart in the present time and to co-exist with other cultures. This notion does not intend to change our original cultural value, but it helps change hearts and minds to be more harmonious with the new culture. There will be moments in the new places where time, space, and location do not permit one to practice their desired culture. Thus, the only exception is to carry one's

desired culture through their heart and mind and embody its values in the moments when they encounter the culture of their choice.

Tongan theologians have done a good job in contextualizing the messages of the Bible by using their cultural understandings and values. Here, the hermeneutical gap involves contextualizing their inner self, the mind and heart into reconciling with another cultural context. The hermeneutical gap looks directly at the future of Tongan people and their youth where they may have lost their minds and bodies to the Tongan culture. The youth that remain faithful to the culture are the ones who are being faithful to their parents. Most of the Tongan American youth only know the surface of the Tongan culture and even with the culture they have different interpretations behind their values. It seems that their parents also lack the voice and understanding to enforce cultural traditions and teach these values because of the new setting of a foreign country and culture.

The inner-self contextualization theory focuses on the internal family system and the self within, which is ruled by a person's feelings. The process of inner-self contextualization is a spiritual movement of the heart, the mind, and the soul. Undoubtedly, Tongan decision-making is based on their feelings toward matters. For the Tongan people, their feelings come first, before their minds. Tongan scholar Dr. Puloka told me, "The Tongan people feel, therefore they are."¹ The hermeneutical gap is that most of the Tongan American youth and some Tongan immigrants assume and therefore they are. For example, some Tongans wear a ta'ovala and flip-flops to church during the winter in Salt Lake City, Utah. Although it might be snowing outside, these Tongans understand that their culture is about embodying these traditions and values, both

¹ Puloka, interview.

mentally and physically. They are displaying and identifying with their Tongan identity, regardless of location or season. When Tongans go to an American occasion, some wear ta'ovala, and some do not. When it comes to their Tongan experience, some wear traditional attire, and some do not. Tongans that are not embodying the physical clothing traditions are confused due to their lack of cultural understanding and this leads to them practicing Tongan cultural traditions at the wrong time and places with the wrong meanings. Perhaps, they believe that the only way to carry out their culture is to embody them physically. These misinterpretations and misunderstandings always result in conflicts and cause splits and separation within the Tongan churches and communities. These cultural issues are due to misunderstanding of the deep Tongan cultural values, and this is visible throughout history and in the way it repeats itself.

However, the old method of contextualization in Tonga (Potted Plant) is believed to be out of date, and it was only useful in its own time and space, like in Tonga. It does not seem to be relevant to co-exist with another cultural setting unless there is a clear understanding among Tongans in general that cultural values can also be carried through the heart and embodied through action. In Tonga, each family has land where each family can build their own house and plant their own crops. In Tonga, people do not have to pay rent or pay for food. Perhaps, they love the taste of their food compared to other food. Tongans usually get coconuts from their own land, and this provides them with the coconut oil and juice that they need. Here in America, people must pay rent to put a roof over their head, and they must pay for food in order to feed their families. The coconut milk and juice are available, but it is not in a coconut shell like Tongans have in Tonga. Instead, it has been commercialized into a can. Things have changed due to the setting outside of Tonga. However, the mix of Tongan Americans and Tongan

immigrants, first and second-generation Tongans, are now living together under one roof and attend the same church in America. This means there are going to be cultural issues that lead to miscommunication and misunderstanding among the community.

Different races are dwelling together with Tongans in American communities and most Tongans probably do not have Tongan neighbors. How can they identify as Tongans in different places and cultures? How can they interpret the Bible through a different cultural lens to be more correct and life-giving? How can they re-contextualize themselves, but remain true to their Tongan culture and traditions? How can they move from the potted-plant transportation method to the inner-self contextualization method without damaging their culture and also find significance in the other method? In the next section, it will provide us with proof and reasons why it is believed that the old method of contextualization (potted plant) is out of date and is not that helpful when residing in a foreign country. Indeed, there is an urge for a method of contextual understanding and interpretation ability for claiming identity when Tongans migrate overseas.

In this chapter, an attempt to make the Bible understood from a Pacific lens by Tongan theologians will be explored. The focus is to provide ways through hermeneutical methodologies to help lead the Tongan abroad into the stage of awareness and understanding where they would grasp the essence of inner-self contextualization as a solution. It is believed that if people understand the history of Tongan culture, the barriers that missionaries had in Tonga, the profound cultural values of Tongans and the communicational language that they can prevent history from repeating itself when Tongans reside overseas.

Section One: From Cultural Contextualization to Inner-Self Contextualization

The Hermeneutical Gap Led to Tongan Contextualization

Do Gentiles have to be circumcised in order to become followers of Christ? Do Jews or Japanese citizens? If so, does it guarantee salvation?²

The definition of contextualization remains a subject of contention amongst professional theologians and there has not been any consensus on the matter. However, what is clear is that contextualization includes the conversion of a text from one perspective to another.³

Additionally, the very field of biblical hermeneutics should be open to interpretation. Rather than considering hermeneutics as a means to an end, people should look at it to find meaning or interpretation as it can be seen in relation to how one can use the biblical text to understand the very making of meaning or the working of power in the world. What is obviously clear from this is that contextualization is a method of communication in which a text from one context is being made comprehensible in another. Tonga has struggled with these issues of trying to find themselves in the Bible for some time. Therefore, they must search from within their imaginations. As Kwok mentioned, without the power of imagination, people cannot envision a different past, present, and future to finding a way to regain and rebuild one's identity.⁴

Cyris H. S. Moon speaks to wonderful enlightenment by stating that "Exodus reveals what anyone who participates in the struggle for liberation comes eventually to realize: God is on

² Hisao Kayama, "The Cornelius Story in the Japanese Cultural Context," in *Voices from the Margin: Interpreting the Bible in the Third World*, 3rd ed., ed. R. S. Sugirtharajah (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2006), 129–41.

³ Gale A. Yee, "An Autobiographical Approach to Feminist Biblical Scholarship," *Encounter* 67, no. 4 (2006): 113, 121.

⁴ Pui-lan Kwok, *Discovering the Bible in the Non-biblical World* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2003), 31. See also Pui-lan Kwok, *Postcolonial Imagination and Feminist Theology* (Louisville: John Knox Press, 2005), chap. 8.

the side of the oppressed and downtrodden and will always give encouragement and protection to them.”⁵ That is why the Bible is sometimes enough in such a situation. However, God is not the one that needs to change. As it has been said, people need to assist in the restoration of their own lives. People do not rely on God alone to liberate them, but they need to act as a partner with God. Tonga believed they would be closer to God if Jesus were a Pacific Islander.

Contextualization is defined as the process whereby the words of God are intelligibly declared to another context. Tongans and all Christian believers do have an important thing in common and that is as they all understand, “the essence of theology is God.”⁶ People all work with the same assumption as believers in the Bible and that is that they all believe the Bible is the word of God. In making such an assertion, people are aware of the fact that even the truths of the Bible are culturally conditioned because no truths can avoid the encroaching influence of culture. Therefore, all interpreters use whatever method necessary to provide a lens of interpretation to free their people from their struggles.⁷ That is what Tongans are essentially doing, in the same way that Eleazar Fernandez used the idea of Exodus-toward-Egypt to help Filipino-Americans understand that the Promised Land in America is not just for the elect, and neither is God.⁸

⁵ Moon, “A Korean Minjung Perspective,” 230.

⁶ Khiok-Khng Yeo, *What Has Jerusalem to Do with Beijing? Biblical Interpretation from a Chinese Perspective* (Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press International, 1998), 11.

⁷ Kah-Jin Jeffrey Kuan and Mai-Anh Le Tran, “Reading Race Reading Rahab: A ‘Broad’ Asian American Reading of a ‘Broad’ Other,” in *Postcolonial Interventions: Essays in Honor of R. S. Sugirtharajah*, ed. Tat-siong Benny Liew (Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2009), 27–44.

⁸ Eleazar S. Fernandez, “Exodus-toward-Egypt: Filipino-Americans’ Struggle to Realize the Promised Land in America,” in *Voices from the Margin: Interpreting the Bible in the Third World*, 3rd ed., edited by R. S. Sugirtharajah (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2006), 242–57.

Rudolf Bultmann's contribution to hermeneutics is namely that exegesis without presupposition is impossible. He correctly observes that "every interpreter brings with him certain conceptions, perhaps idealistic or psychological as presuppositions of his exegesis, in most cases unconsciously."⁹ Hermeneutics is indeed a daily process, because people engage in it every time they read a newspaper, see a display on a notice board, or even in school listening to lectures. When it comes to reading the Bible, hermeneutics usually refers to the way people read, make meaning, and apply the biblical message to their current situation. It is how people take an ancient text and hear what it is saying to people living in the here and now. In other words, with respect to reading the Bible, hermeneutics seeks to respond to the question: What is the meaning of the passage in front of a person for today? People should be able to shed more light on this definition through a comparison of hermeneutics, exegesis, and homiletics. However, in every social location, people's social, political, historical, and economic realities play a significant role in how people read and interpret the Bible. That is the here and the now.¹⁰

A Tongan Biblical Lens

"What is clear . . . is that contextualization is a method of communication in which a text from one context is being made comprehensible in another."¹¹ Given this hermeneutical morass, what hope is there for a Tongan reader to understand reality as it is mediated through any given

⁹ Rudolf Bultmann, *Jesus Christ and Mythology* (London: SCM Press, 1958), 52.

¹⁰ Lai Ling Elizabeth Ngan, "Neither Here nor There: Boundary and Identity in the Hagar Story," in *Ways of Being, Ways of Reading: Asian American Biblical Interpretation*, ed. Mary F. Foskett and Jeffrey Kah-Jin Kuan (St. Louis, MO: Chalice Press, 2006), 70–83; Lai Ling Elizabeth Ngan, "Bitter Melon, Bitter Delight: Reading Jeremiah Reading Me," in *Off the Menu: Asian and Asian North American Women's Religion and Theology*, ed. Rita Nakashima Brock, Jung Ha Kim, Kwok Pui-Lan, Seung Ai Yang (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2007), 163–82.

¹¹ Yee, "An Approach to Feminist Biblical Scholarship," 113, 121.

text, including the Bible? There is hope for any Tongan to be a competent reader, since Tongans' particular viewpoint on reality can be justified based on Tongan knowledge and understanding. The label "Tongan" represents the community of interpreters to which I belong. As a result, whatever my viewpoint on reality, reflecting on any given text, it is not wrong anymore because deconstructionism undoes the categories of right and wrong in reading texts.¹² Instead, the reading of any given text is, simply, Tongan—whatever that may mean!

In accordance with hermeneutical relativism, a person can only see reality as it is presented to them based on their background. That is to say that a person can never really know anything without having it influenced by their background. For example, if someone is from Tonga, they will interpret new things based on how they were raised in Tonga. A person reads texts, including the Bible, in their own Tongan way, if they are Tongan. Any given texts then, though the subject matter may vary, are bound to provide a person with the same type of message; the reader interprets their messages based on their personal identity, rather than seeking to understand the universal meanings of the texts. Since Tongans are not very familiar with the broader context and culture of the Bible, they only look for the explicit messages and use their cultural understanding in making meaning.¹³ This is what I refer to as the "Tongan way."

Tongans' First Cultural Contextualizations Attempted

After the missionaries left Tonga, Tongans had to search for the meaning of the gospel on their own. It took some time to finally make sense of the gospel that had been shared with them. The way that Tongans were able to deal with these issues was through contextualization. They

¹² Ma'afu Palu, "Contextualization within the Parameters of the Bible: Towards a Biblical Pacific Theology" (DMin diss., Faith Seminary, Tonga Extension, 2004), chap. 2.

¹³ See also Palu, "Contextualization within the Parameters of the Bible," chap. 2.

had to contextualize the messages to be relevant to the people. The people in Tonga read the Bible for years, trying to fully contextualize it, before a model of contextualization was introduced by Dr. Havea. One example of these difficulties was not knowing or being familiar with the context for which the Bible was written. But there was a need to make the gospel grow in the Tongan soil. Therefore, Tongans used their own Tongan cultural traditions to make sense of the gospel's messages. For example, "Jesus is the bread of life," is a phrase that was a bit of a challenge because Tongans did not know what bread was at that time, and they did not know what grapevines, wheat, and other items found in the Bible were. Tongans came up with their own culturally important substitutes for items in the Bible. For people to understand the message, leaders would say that Jesus is the coconut of life, which made complete sense to the people of Tonga. Tongans frequently asked themselves the question, "What if Jesus had grown up in Tonga?" If Jesus had grown up in Tonga, he would have taught using their culture, while wearing Tongan attire and eating Tongan food. Therefore, Tongans see Jesus as Tongan and wearing the ta'ovala. As Green asserts, "Embracing the Bible as scripture, we do not accept it as one narrative among others, but accord it a privilege above all others, and allow ourselves to be shaped by it."¹⁴

I am not attempting to build a wall, but to find harmony among the living. From my perspective, people are somehow epistemologically trying to make sense of what is in front of them, and then they need to put their understanding into practice before they can have faith in its essence (ontology). Each culture has its own way of thinking, reading, and interpreting the Bible. One example of this is Indian readers, who already contain a mindset that, without experiencing

¹⁴ See J. B. Green, "Scripture and Theology: Failed Experiments, Fresh Perspectives," *Interpretation* 56, no. 1 (2002): 20.

oneness with the essence (God), they cannot fully reach the fullness of nothingness.¹⁵ This way uses a particular understanding of cosmology to interpret reality; as Yeo says, “Time and space serve as a contextual theology.”¹⁶

In the past sixty years or so, the Pacific interpretational lens has shifted due to a variety of Pacific gospels, or more appropriately, theologies, which have been propagated by various Pacific theologians. These have been derived, following Sione 'Amanaki Havea's lead in developing coconut theology, from their physical surroundings, their customs, and from their legends and myths. From their immediate physical surroundings in the Pacific, the following people have developed new theologies: Ilaitia Tuwere (oceanic theology), Keiti Kanongata'a (theology of birthing and liberation), and Jovili Meo (theology of smallness).¹⁷ This, of course, is not an exhaustive list of the various theologies that have come about through the operation of the methodological procedure proposed by Dr. Havea, but it is a sufficient sample to display the vast array of theologies produced through it.¹⁸ In addition, “From the vantage point of Pacific customs we have Dr. Havea's ‘Theology of Celebration’, Boseto's ‘Gospel of economy’, Dr. Mafaufau's ‘Pacific time’ and Dr. Koria's ‘Samoan Concept of *Fa'aaloalo*’.”¹⁹

¹⁵ George M. Soares-Prabhu, “Laughing at Idols: The Dark Side of Biblical Monotheism (an Indian Reading of Isaiah 44:9–20),” in *Reading from This Place*, vol. 2, *Social Location and Biblical Interpretation in Global Perspective*, ed. Fernando F. Segovia and Mary Ann Tolbert (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1995), 109–131.

¹⁶ Yeo, *What Has Jerusalem to Do with Beijing?*, 11.

¹⁷ Ma'afu Palu, “The Quest for a Pacific Theology: A Re-consideration of Its Methodology” (paper presented at the Convention on Contextual Theology, Tonga, 2002), 6-7, https://www.academia.edu/28645382/The_Quest_for_a_Pacific_Theology_A_Re_consideration_of_its_Methodology.

¹⁸ For other examples of Pacific theologies, see K. Solomone, ‘Ecumenism in Oceania’ *PJT* 2:24 (2000) 98-101. See also Tuwere, ‘Agenda’, 8.

¹⁹ Palu, “Quest for a Pacific Theology,” 7.

It should be said that the driving force of this entire movement toward a Pacific theology from Pacific Islanders is “seeking to make the Jesus Christ of the Bible meaningful to people living in the Pacific Islands,” and it is a very noble aim.²⁰ Undoubtedly, Dr. Havea led the way in applying the message of the gospel to people in the Pacific Islands through cultural symbols more suitable to their existential presence and particularity.²¹ Dr. Havea and other theologians have done a remarkable job in interpreting the meaning of the Bible from a Pacific lens. The question is, how can people interpret the Bible or their culture from a foreign lens, since there are more Tongans residing overseas than there are in Tonga?

In a speech given at the Third Assembly of the Pacific Conference of Churches in 1976, Sir John Guise, Governor-General of Papua New Guinea, argued that “many thousands of Christians in the Pacific believe in the Christian faith, but they believe in Christ in an abstract form because Christ was not born in any of the Pacific countries; he may still be someone who does not belong to the soil of the Pacific. But the Christian faith, and Christ himself, must become a living reality in our villages, in our culture as well as in our lives.”²² Guise was saying that the Jesus Christ of the Bible is an abstract concept to Pacific Island Christians because he is geographically removed from them. Hence, Pacific Island theologians began working to make the abstract figure of the Jesus Christ of the Bible, who was born in Bethlehem, “belong to the

²⁰ Palu, “Contextualization within the Parameters of the Bible,” Abstract.

²¹ Palu, “Contextualization within the Parameters of the Bible,” chap. 2.

²² John Guise, “Welcome to Papua New Guinea: Reveal to Us the Pacific Christ,” in *Report of the Third Assembly, Pacific Conference of Churches*, ed. Lotu Pasifika Productions (Suva, Fiji: Pacific Conference of Churches, 1976), 10, <https://archive.org/details/pcctthirdassemblypng1976/page/8/mode/2up>.

soil of the Pacific.” However, Guise did not go so far as to offer a methodology for how to localize Christ in the Pacific context.²³

Dr. Havea took up this initiative at the 1986 meeting of Pacific evangelical theologians in Papua New Guinea and claimed that the Christianity brought by the nineteenth-century missionaries was a foreign religion, since it has remained nurtured, as it were, in its Western theological pod. Pacific theology as a theme is, therefore, an effort to put faith and the Gospel in the local soil and context so that they can exist in a local climate. It is an effort to interpret and to see with Pacific eyes and to listen with Pacific ears to the gospel message and thus to contextualize it. His working assumption is that the good news is universal. What people have as the ‘good news’ in the gospel is the teachings of Jesus, who had grown up in a Hebraic context. Since Jesus grew up in a Hebraic context, particularly in his parables. He illustrated many things which were regional and limited to his culture and environment, and yet the meanings and theological interpretations were universal: the message can be proved relevant to the whole ecumenical community.²⁴ Therefore, to contextualize is to imagine what Jesus would have taught had he grown up in the Pacific context.²⁵

Dr. Havea is quite certain that if Jesus had grown up in a Pacific context, he would have related his teachings to what is available in the Pacific: the coconut, yams, and taro; the Pacific delicacies; the hibiscus and orchids; the kava (*yangona*) and betel nuts; and the celebrations of birth, marriage, and death. Consequently, Pacific theology constitutes the imaginary construction of the teachings or the theologies of Jesus had he grown up as a Pacific Islander. In other words,

²³ Palu, “Contextualization within the Parameters of the Bible,” chap. 2.

²⁴ Havea, “Christianity in the Pacific Context,” 12.

²⁵ Havea, “Christianity in the Pacific Context,” 12.

the question which sets the contemporary agenda of Pacific theology is: What if Jesus had been a Pacific Islander? If Jesus held the highest authority and had respectful interactions with women, then whoever holds power should do likewise.²⁶ The king and all the nobles should follow Jesus's example of leadership. This would be applicable if Jesus were Tongan.²⁷

However, most interpreters in the Pacific have used their own sociocultural contexts as a method for interpreting the Bible, similar to feminist, cultural, post-colonial, and liberation theology interpretations of the Bible. People have been concerned about many issues, including gender, oppression, and culture. Therefore, they have used whatever method was necessary to provide a lens and mind of interpretation to best help their people understand the Bible and apply it personally.²⁸ These were attempts to deal with issues of contextualization as a way of bridging the hermeneutical gap between the people for whom the Bible was first written and people in today's world. *Contextualization* remains a slippery term because it is not easy to grasp it with a simple definition; it is generally accepted that it involves making the content of the Bible relevant to people in a contemporary situation. It seeks to bridge the hermeneutical gap between the times of the Bible and the present.²⁹

The current method of contextualization in the Pacific involves a technique that has come to be known by its practitioners as the *pot-plant transportation* model. The fundamental assumption of this model is that biblical truths are timeless and can therefore be transported from the culture they were nourished in and be transported to the cultural *soil* of the Pacific and thrive

²⁶ Hisako Kinukawa, "The Story of the Hemorrhaging Woman (Mark 5:25–34) Read from a Japanese Feminist Context," *Biblical Interpretation* 2 (1994): 283–93.

²⁷ See Havea, "Christianity in the Pacific Context," 12.

²⁸ Kuan and Tran, "Reading Race Reading Rahab," 27–44.

²⁹ Palu, "Contextualization within the Parameters of the Bible," chap. 2.

within that new environment. However, in this case, the culture of the biblical truths is not the Jewish culture, but the Western culture.³⁰

Tongans now reside in foreign countries and multicultural settings. They are in places where religion and theology have been dominated by privileged white male voices, so people's conception of religion is infected by a colonial vision and the idea that the white Christian male's understandings of the world are the only correct ones. This has done a lot of damage to how people conceive religion and how they engage in religious dialogue, because other religions and cultures are not taken seriously, and they are all filtered through white Christian experience. Kwok says that this all needs to be challenged; people need to rethink how they engage in religious dialogue, so that it does not become more colonizing; so the white male voices are not the only ones that are being heard, but all people are able to engage with each other on the plane of shared experience.³¹ Kwok essentially asks whether religious plurality and recognizing other people's religions is still possible, because religion has been dominated so much by North American and European cultures. The way in which people can survive is not trying to contextualize their culture to what they desire as the missionaries did in Tonga, but to contextualize themselves to be co-harmonious with those cultures, and contextualize their hearts into accepting the differences. The goal is not to change the American Jesus and culture to become Tongan, but to encourage all believers to see themselves as a part of other cultures through shared beliefs. The goal is to embody those cultural values as a contribution to building a better community and finding unity through diversity.³²

³⁰ Palu, "Contextualization within the Parameters of the Bible," chap. 2.

³¹ Kwok, *Postcolonial Imagination and Feminist Theology*, chap. 8.

³² Kwok, *Postcolonial Imagination and Feminist Theology*, chap. 8.

Starting in this section and continuing throughout the rest of the chapter there will be a multi angle evaluation of cultural core values that can best be used as fishing nets in the Ocean of the Unknown. Undoubtedly, by providing these origin values of the Tongan context, it will help Tongans understand their culture deeply, and it will help them reconcile the issues caused by the poor understanding of cultural core values among Tongans in general. Thus, Tongan hermeneutical interpretation methods include language—*talanoa* and *talanga*—while the heart of the Tongan loving nature and the cultural values of their main culture, the ta’ovala and kava, will be unveiled to serve as the net. The hope of providing these methodologies is for all Tongans in the US to understand the uniqueness of their culture and to help each other embody their culture truly through their hearts as a method of inner-self contextualization.

The Tongan Language

Language plays a huge factor in Tongan translation and communication. They must first translate the text into the level of the language they understand to interpret its meaning. A famous quote commonly attributed to Nelson Mandela states, “If you talk to a man in a language he understands, that goes to his head. If you talk to him in his own language, that goes to his heart.”³³ If a Tongan immigrant pupil were to be spoken to in the English language, it would not have the same effect as if they were communicated to in their native language. For some people, adapting to a new language and new traditions is an easier process, and they adapt well to the new culture and traditions. However, these new cultural changes can also enable one culture to overlap or have more impact on one’s life than the other. Thus, language is theological, and it has a divine dimension. It is “a gift of God, to be used gratefully and responsibly as we

³³ Pierre de Galbert, “My Favorite Nelson Mandela (Mis)quote,” Pierre de Galbert (blog), February 18, 2019, <https://scholar.harvard.edu/pierredegalbert/node/632263>.

communicate with others.”³⁴ It is not evolutionary or based on grammatology, but is God’s gift of the capacity to relate to the world and communicate with others. God is a communicative agent who uses language to communicate with His people. John 1:14 describes the Word or Christ becoming flesh and dwelling among the people, and the reader has the ability to interpret the message in a way that makes sense based on their understanding of what is written and how it fits into their language and culture.

In perspective, speaking and writing in a specific language requires both scientific and aesthetic aspects. It is scientific because every language has its own conventional and institutional rules and principles of grammar, semiotics, semantics, and paroles. These rules and principles collectively form a conventional system whereby every speaker or writer observes to effectively communicate with others in a community. On top of that it is also aesthetic in the way the communicative agent utilizes choice of words, forms, and structures in speaking or writing to be more effective and persuasive. The communicative energy in rhetoric is a way of communicating what he or she means. One way to understand the textual meaning is to analyze the language code and the aesthetics of the language. Be reminded that people analyze not as structuralists, postmodernists, or deconstructionists do (these people do not believe in any author), but as communicative agents who believe in the author’s communicative action.³⁵

³⁴ Kevin J. Vanhoozer, *Is There a Meaning in This Text? The Bible, the Reader, and the Morality of Literary Knowledge* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1998), 262. Vanhoozer argues that language has a designed plan that is inherently covenantal.

³⁵ Vanhoozer, *Is There a Meaning in This Text?*, chap. 5. Vanhoozer argues that understanding texts is a matter of achieving generic competence—the know-how of what the text is (form) and what it is about (content). Each literary form has its own key and scale as cognitive tools for generating worldviews.

Language, verbal or written, is a medium of social communication for mutual understanding and is not intended to be the private property or knowledge of the user. It has its own rules and systems for both the speaker (writer) and the listener (reader) to observe for communication to be meaningful. Of course, a text is a communicative act, a discourse fixed in writing.³⁶ Similar to Austin's speech act theory, I believe that a text has an author (someone who means) who communicates something (propositional content) to someone else (the one who reads) about something (subject matter). There are neither authorless texts nor textless readers in existence. Therefore, a text is a communicative action fixed by writing and not an autonomous persona having a career of its own.³⁷

Understanding one's language is most necessary when it comes to the world of communication and interpretation. In the next few sections, the role of the Tongan language and ways to grasp its essential value will be discussed. It is incredibly valuable for the Tongan American second generation to gain awareness of their language's unique core principles. It will help to lead them into a more profound understanding of their cultural values.

Heart of the Tongan Language

Pre-contact Tongan society was stratified into six social classes. These social structures are still evident today in Tonga. At the apex was the king (*tu'i*), then the chiefs (*hou'eiki*), the gentlemen (*mu'a*), the esquires or officers (*matāpule*), the commoners (*tu'a*) and the captives or slaves (*popula*).³⁸ Since contact, the Tongan language has developed three levels of unique

³⁶ Paul Ricoeur, *Interpretation Theory: Discourse and the Surplus of Meaning* (Fort Worth, TX: Christian Univ. Press, 1976), 29. I borrow Ricoeur's definition of *text* but not his new criticism approach.

³⁷ Ricoeur, *Interpretation Theory*, 29.

³⁸ Alfred Harold Wood, *History and Geography of Tonga* (Nuku'alofa, Tonga: Government Printing Dept. for the Friendly Islands Bookshop, 2003), 3.

vocabulary to correlate with the three main social classes in society: the commoners (*kau tu'a/lāuvale*), the chiefs (*hou'eiki*), and the king (*tu'i*).³⁹ The following sections will describe some characteristics of the Tongan language that show its distinctions from other languages.

“Communicating in the Tongan language happens when Tongans can be comfortably imaginative, communicative, and productive.”⁴⁰ Their language is an inherent part of their identity and subjectivity. That is where their constitutive rules and institutional facts of their language naturally meet to enhance effective communication. Forcing Tongans to communicate and be examined in foreign languages doubles the alienation from their identities and from their beings. It does not mean that mastering a foreign language is impossible. It signifies great sacrifice and commitment for someone to master a foreign language in order to communicate in that language effectively. The Rev. Dr. J. E. Moulton mastered the Tongan language to effectively communicate with the people with energy.⁴¹

Understanding the Language's Value

There are different noun and verb forms for each of the three main social classes.⁴² The

³⁹ ‘Opeti Manisela Taliai, “Social Differentiation of Language Levels in Tonga” (master’s thesis, University of Auckland, 1989), 136.

⁴⁰ Jione Havea, “Tefua ‘a Vakavaka’āmei,” in *Dreadlocks Vaka Vuku: Special Issue—Proceedings of the Pacific Epistemologies Conference 2006*, ed. Mohit Prasad (Suva, Fiji: Pacific Writing Forum for the University of the South Pacific, 2006), 2-4. Dr. Havea argues that Pacific Islanders are more effective when they use their mother tongues in worship and in celebrating the Holy Communion than when they use a foreign language. Speaking a foreign language and not one’s own language is a *kokono* (painful experience).

⁴¹ Penisimani T. Mone, “Theological Hermeneutics in Contextual Theology: Moulton as a Second Author in the Tongan Society” (master’s thesis, Pacific Theological College, 2006), chap. 3. Rev. Dr. J. E. Moulton was one of the more prominent missionaries to Tonga in the nineteenth century.

⁴² For example, the English verb *go(es)* and the Greek *apérchomai* are expressed by three different Tongan words, each from one of the three main social classes. The English noun *shoes* can be translated as *pōpao* (commoners), *sū* (chiefs), and *topuva’e* (king). *Ko e tohi kalama mo e*

Tongans address one another in public according to their respective social status with these different culturally appropriate verb and noun forms. Public usage of terms appropriate for a person's social status marks the experience and excellent command of a speaker or writer in the Tongan culture and language. Any misappropriation of words for a person of a different social class marks the social ignorance of the addresser, and it can also mean a public sarcastic mockery or insult to the dignity of the addressee. Analyzing the usage of different social class terms is one way that observers of public presentations can quickly identify the social class status of the various persons involved.

Moulton's use of different class terms in his Tongan translation of the gospel according to Matthew shows his theological intentions. Moulton translates the Greek *légei* (meaning "to speak, to name, to call, to imply, or to mean") into *lea* ("to speak to the commoners") in Matthew 4:7; into *me'a* ("to speak to the chiefs") in Matthew 28:9, and into *folofola* ("to speak to the king") in 21:19.⁴³ With such translations, Moulton indicates that when Jesus talks with the devil in the wilderness or with the ordinary people, they speak (*lea*) to each other as though they are on an equal commoner level. When Jesus was resurrected from the dead, Moulton's translation says that Jesus speaks (*me'a*) as a Lord when he greets the women outside the tomb. However, when Jesus moves to pronounce the final verdicts or judgments on issues or cases, Moulton translates Jesus's *spoke* into *folofola*, as if he were the king with ultimate authority like God Himself. Moulton's version of the Bible identifies Jesus's speech as *folofola* when he curses the

lea Fakatonga [Grammar of the Tongan language] (Nuku'alofa, Tonga: Government Printing, 2001), 63–64.

⁴³ Johannes P. Louw and Eugene A. Nida, eds., *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament: Based on Semantic Domains*, 2nd ed., vol. 1 (New York: United Bible Societies, 1989), 447.

unfruitful fig tree (Matt 21:19), when he says to give to Caesar what is Caesar's (Matt 22:21), when he states that the teachers of the law and the Pharisees sit in Moses's seat (Matt 23:1), and when he declares that all authority in heaven and on earth has been given to Him (Matt 28:18). This description of Moulton's usage of different verb forms reveals that Moulton saw Jesus as both the Son of Man and the Son of God at the same time. This is an invention of Moulton's through the use of Tongan linguistic conventions and not the intention behind the original author's use of *légei* in the gospel. Moulton theorizes within the translation to contextualize his theology. This is a contextual theological translation.⁴⁴

The biblical languages and even the English language lack those special nouns and verb forms for Tongans' different social classes. Biblical peoples had different social classes, but their verb and noun forms did not instantly distinguish the social classes of those involved in the narrative or discourse. Cummins comments on Moulton's translation theory: "Moulton's translations were frequently a result of a research for words, phrases and concepts which reached across cultural barriers and lifted the word of God out of the Middle East and the first century, and placed it into the vocabulary, concepts and thought forms of Polynesian culture."⁴⁵ Moulton did more than translate the word of God into the vocabulary, concepts, and thought forms of Polynesian culture. Moulton theologized on top of what the original authors meant to say to their intended audiences by saying something more theological to his Tongan readers than what was originally intended.

⁴⁴ Mone, "Theological Hermeneutics in Contextual Theology," chap. 3.

⁴⁵ H. G. Cummins, "Missionary Chieftain: James Egan Moulton and Tongan Society, 1865–1909" (PhD diss., Australian National University, 1980), 188, <https://openresearch-repository.anu.edu.au/handle/1885/10712>.

In Tonga, Tongans tell their traditional oral stories through *talanoa* (oral storytelling by one person) and *talanga* (sharing and discussing a story in a group). There is not much writing done to record stories and histories. The only way to deeply grasp the essentials of the Tongan language and its distinct role in Tongan social classes is through understanding *talanoa* and *talanga*.

Talanoa

According to Nāsili Vaka’uta, “The word *tala* means to tell, inform or expose. The nature and context of *tala* vary according to the many words that are affixed to it. As an example, *talanoa* . . . is chatting or talking in a free and informal manner (*noa*), as in the act of storytelling. In *talanoa*, there is no agenda to dictate the conversation. At times it can be done without the participation or presence of a second party, for instance, *talanoa-moe-loto* (to converse with one’s heart).”⁴⁶ The importance of *talanoa* is that language is used to tell a story. In *talanoa*, the storyteller uses language at the level of the people to reach them more effectively. This is a better and easier way of understanding and learning the language and culture. Genuinely, there is nothing that touches and teaches the hearts of the Tongans more than listening to a story being told through a *talanoa* or a *talanga* in the language they understand. They receive and perceive the story more effectively when they listen to the story being told verbally (*tala*). They can read a book or watch a movie, but it would not be as effective as hearing the stories orally in the tradition of *Tala*. Tongans profoundly feel the story when they hear it, and it helps to transform their lives faster than anything else.

⁴⁶ Nāsili Vaka’uta, “Tālanga: Theorizing a Tongan Mode of Interpretation,” *AlterNative: An International Journal of Indigenous Peoples* 5, no. 1 (2009): 130, <https://doi.org/10.1177/117718010900500109>.

However, this section focuses only on the uniqueness of its role in the transformation of their cultural and personal identities. Furthermore, understanding the language in a talanoa can help listeners discover the hidden values behind their oral traditional stories and allow them to interpret the stories with the right meanings. This is because, by understanding a story, its core meaning goes to the hearts of the audience. Consequently, stories describe human knowledge regarding experience, awareness, and action. It helps people to know who they are, where they are and what to do. Thus, people have learned from the stories of our traditions, culture, and ancestors throughout their lives in different ways. It also helps them interpret their lives and identities in an accurate and effective manner. Talanoa serves as a guide for Tongan people in relation to who they are, how they see themselves in the stories and how the stories help them form their identities. They are important for the formation and regaining of their true identities when living in a foreign country. Over the years, Tongans have written and talked about their stories, and it provides them with deeper meaning in their lives and experiences. Talanoa always embodies assumptions and therefore, Tongans engage in the stories to find the hidden values that need to be unfolded. Following these traditions and uncovering those values helps people feel more liberated, find healing, and find a cultural core identity within talanoa. However, there are skills, ways, and methods that are needed in talanoa to be beneficial for Tongans in their lives as a whole as it relates to the context, they are living in. Therefore, there is a need for Tongans to be aware of these language barriers in order to better communicate and to interpret messages fully.⁴⁷

Talanoa is teaching awareness and appreciation for one's cultural heritage in the core narratives of a particular tradition and making those narratives one's own. In Tongan

⁴⁷ See Frank Rogers Jr., *Finding God in the Graffiti: Empowering Teenagers through Stories* (Cleveland: Pilgrim Press, 2011), 34.

communities, Tongans consider specific stories to be intrinsically transformative. Therefore, the contents of those stories are narratively constituted, and they help strengthen the community's culture as a whole. The talanoa approach helps people internalize those stories as their own, to interpret the world through their own lenses, and to participate with those stories and unfold their messages. "Stories live with us for a long time, however, knowing a community entails learning that community's story, and joining a community entails making that story one's own."⁴⁸

Nurturing an intentional reflection on the story deepens one's understanding of the story. The personal reflection that surfaces with one's personal connections with the story draws out the story's conceptual possibilities and allows the reader to interpret contemporary experiences through the story's lenses. In order to effectively tell a story, people can use whatever methods they would like to retell the story, including storytelling, drama, film, songs, or multisensory immersions.⁴⁹

As has been noted previously, the Tongan experience is rooted in living a communal lifestyle. In addition, Tongans make their decisions based on their feelings toward everything. Feelings play a huge role in the lives of Tongans. For example, when someone dies in a village, each and every person will wear black clothing, regardless of their relation to the family. That is how we show our feelings for each other. Behaving this way is more than just feeling sad about the person who died, it is about empathy and compassion toward others; it is about the feeling that is ruled by love. Not wearing black and mourning with the family that lost a loved one would not feel right within the community. "We are told by psychologists (and know from experience) that love in the fullest sense involves a sympathetic response to the loved one—

⁴⁸ Rogers, *Finding God in the Graffiti*, 34.

⁴⁹ Rogers, *Finding God in the Graffiti*, 34.

feeling the feelings of the other. This feeling of something being both part of us and more than us—something within us and beyond us—is revelatory of the very nature of reality.”⁵⁰

A person’s feelings depend on their willingness to step into the narrative world and to allow themselves to be directed by the context they are in. That is to say that people step into the projected narrative world of their people and become part of that world of concerns and experience a transformation in their feelings and attitudes about the broader world based on new experiences. This transformation may not be reached at a high level through an expository sermon or theological treatise. As the Bible acknowledges, even death is no longer seen as the judgment of God for sins (Gen. 2:17; Rom. 5:12-21; 6:23), but as a contribution to in-group feelings and family cohesion. Feeling is what connects people’s practical theology with the suffering in their surroundings. Talanoa must be told in a language that relates to the feelings of the youth of the second-generation in America. The one thing that all Tongans have in common is their use of their feelings first in their decision-making or toward any worthy cause.

Talanga

Talanga is a practice, not a theory. A Tongan mode of interpretation based on talanga ought to be practice-based, rather than hinging on abstract ideas and relying on discipline-based concepts, theories, and methods. Talanga intends to help people access the often-subliminal stories that constitute their sense of self-identity, to expose people to the healing and liberative communal stories of their cultural traditions, and finally, to do so through a critical and creative synthesis of personal stories and communal stories that assists people in

⁵⁰ Frank Rogers Jr., “Finding God in the Graffiti” (unpublished manuscript), Microsoft Word file, chap. 2.

constructing a coherent sense of narrative identity that is meaningful, healing, and life-giving.⁵¹

The purpose of talanga is to help people share life stories, reflect on the extent to which these stories are life-giving or life-denying, and reimagine self-narratives in dialogue with healing and restoring cultural traditions. The role of talanga is to weave personal stories and cultural stories to enrich meaning and identity. Frank Rogers provides five methods that can help with the process of talanga: (1) Help people “*access the personal self-stories by which they live*,” by inviting life experience stories relevant to a theme or according to a narrative arc; (2) “*nurture critical reflection on these self-stories*”; (3) expose persons “*to liberative stories from their religious cultural traditions*”; (4) “*engage in a mutually illuminating dialogue between our self-stories and the liberative stories of our religious and cultural traditions*”; and (5) invite persons to “*envision and commit to liberative action within the unfolding story of their lives*.”⁵² Talanga invites people to see themselves and others in new ways, and it opens them up to fresh possibilities for being in the world and creating change in it.⁵³ According to Rogers, “A coherent sense of self is fundamental to being alive. Human beings need to know who they are, what they stand for, where they’ve come from, . . . Without a coherent sense of identity, life loses meaning, experience becomes fragmented, personal vitality is stifled, and social bonds become frayed.”⁵⁴

Section Conclusion

Since Tongans in America have accepted new ways of living, adapted to the predominant culture, and adjusted the way they live, that has affected the way they think and do things. After Christianity was first brought to Tonga by the missionaries, Tonga was changed forever. In the

⁵¹ Rogers, *Finding God in the Graffiti*, 64.

⁵² Rogers, *Finding God in the Graffiti*, 66-73.

⁵³ Rogers, *Finding God in the Graffiti*, 73.

⁵⁴ Rogers, *Finding God in the Graffiti*, 55.

previous chapter, the cultural changes were examined as a result of the missionaries in Tonga and how they carried those cultural values with them when living abroad. While these changes happened, the hearts of Tongans remained true to their celebratory nature and to the Golden Bands; these were never a challenge for them to maintain.

It seemed like the only things that changed were physical matters like clothing, house styles, and outside development to the land, but no changes occurred within the nature of their hearts. They have never accepted anything that will change their identity, culture, and faith. Tongan scholars have tried for years to use the method of contextualization intended to make sense of the Bible and new philosophies that arrived in Tonga. The attempt by the Tongan scholars was done in a way that would not change or affect the way they live and do things. They were just building a physical bridge for the land and culture. They were still unable to build an internal pathway to bridge the hermeneutical gap of trust and build a good relationship. By doing so, it provided Tongans with mutual benefits in understanding and awareness between their mind, heart, and body. Conceivably, Tongan people love their culture and identity like no other cultures. Their way of life guides their decision-making process and lifestyle wherever they are in the world. Tongans would rather die than allow change to their celebratory nature and cultural lifestyle. However, their lifestyle and culture are based in their hearts. As mentioned in the previous chapter, Tongans go all out for all their celebrations. When residing overseas, where people work in order to pay rent, put food on table, and there is not anything that is free, the Tongan celebratory nature becomes their biggest challenge. If they continue to celebrate as if there is no tomorrow then they will continue to live incredibly sad lives, and could split from church, be deported back to Tonga, or be put in prison.

What has been introduced here is the crisis that has occurred in using traditional cultural contextualization in theology (faith) in another context. People need to show respect for others despite their differences. All people have the same value in God's eyes. There is no better or worse. All people are lost, but God's love can bring them home. People must move away from paternalism, hegemony, ethnocentrism, and racism by practicing a love that breaks down barriers in religion and communities that are willing to suffer and accept the culture of the ones they are called to serve.

Tongans are now residing in foreign countries where they are encountering new cultures. They are in places where religion and theology have been dominated by privileged, white male voices, so Tongans' concept of religion is infected by a colonial vision and the idea that the white Christian male's understanding of the world is the proper way to think. This has done a lot of damage to how people conceive religion and how they engage in religious dialogues, because other religions and cultures are not taken seriously, and are often filtered through white Christian lens. Kwok says this all needs to be challenged, and people need to rethink how they engage in religious dialogues to avoid them becoming more colonized through the dominant white male voices. If people are able engage freely in religious discussion without fear of retaliation they can create shared experiences, Kwok asked the question about whether religious plurality and recognizing other people's religion is still possible, because religion has been dominated so much by North American and European culture. The way in which people can survive is not trying to contextualize their culture to what others desire as the missionaries did in Tonga but to contextualize themselves to be co-harmonious with those cultures. The goal is not to change the American view of Jesus and culture to make them become Tongan. The goal is to allow oneself

to be a part of those cultures. People need to embody their cultural values as a contribution to building a better community and finding unity through diversity.

In the next section, I will provide tools for Tongans to build a connectional bridge between the past and the present. These tools are the best available methods for inner-self contextualization for Tongans. Using these tools will provide them with understanding, awareness, limitations, and profound changes within their lives. The tools will save them, liberate them, and help them take pride in their culture by knowing the true values behind their cultural traditions. They will no longer carry a false understanding of their identity and culture.

Section Two: The Tongan Fishing Net and Ways of Fishing for the Heart

This section will take another look at the Tongan cultural values (the fishing net) of the dress code, the kava ceremony, and the Tongan loving nature and why they can be useful in fishing for Tongans' hearts. These significant values were discussed in the previous chapter, but it is imperative to provide ways for how they can be applied in modern times.

The Dress Code

The ta'ovala is the Tongan people's original clothing, which they traditionally wore when they approached the king to show their respect to the person they thought was the ruler of nature. The kiekie is a ta'ovala that could only be worn by young women. Wearing the kiekie was a pathway from one stage to another in a woman's life, from being single to being married. Wearing the kiekie symbolized a totally different stage of body and spirit in a Tongan woman's life.⁵⁵

It is important to understand that wearing the kiekie is not a religious practice, but a

⁵⁵ Free Wesleyan Church of Tonga, "Tohi fanongonongo," vol. 1.

cultural tradition that has different values depending on who is wearing it. In Tonga today, young women are still wearing the kiekie. Wearing a ta'ovala or kiekie is one of the Tongan traditions that is still practiced today. The wearing of the kiekie and ta'ovala is an outward way for women and men to identify their appreciation for their culture as Tongans. Tongans wear them when attending weddings and other important occasions. Tongan people refused to wear the clothing that was introduced by Western sailors and missionaries. The long coat and hat were considered impolite and disrespectful in the Tongan culture, so Tongans rejected the new fashions to preserve their culture.⁵⁶ However, people need to respect other cultures and traditions, not only because they have a different value behind their own culture, but to preserve their human connections.

The Kava Ceremony

The kava ceremony practiced in ancient times in Tonga was preserved for some significant reasons. These reasons had nothing to do with their heart, it had to do with the culture of praising the king and the nobles. After accepting Christianity, the king chose to keep the kava ceremony and the dress code but with different purposes. Instead of focusing their respect only toward the king and chiefs by wearing the ta'ovala, they now also show their respect for God. When attending the kava circle, one must wear a ta'ovala, which wraps around one's waist with a kafa. A kafa is a bigger rope weaved together with four smaller ropes. Each of the four small ropes serves a different purpose. The first small rope is anga faka'apa'apa, the second is tauhi vaha'a, the third is mamahi'i me'a, and the fourth rope is lototo. When these ropes are woven together, they become the Tongan Golden Bands or the Tongan anga' ofa (Tongan loving

⁵⁶ Kanongata'a, interview.

nature). When participating in the kava ceremony, each person must be willing to listen to the ‘olovaha and the *matāpule* (the ‘olovaha’s speakers who sit on either side of the king or noble in the circle).

In the kava practice, the Tongan men would sit in a circle to receive the king’s messages. This is how Tongan men showed their respect. At the village level, the men would sit in the circle of the kava to receive guidance from and listen to the chief or the elder to learn what they had to offer. Here in the US, this practice helps stop young adults from being violent toward each other. Not only do the youth learn from this, but also the adults. Traditionally, the adults would have the opportunity to dialog with other adults from different villages. The men would have a chance to sit outside and drink kava with the youth, which is a traditional cultural experience for Tongans, and which is where a lot of important dialog takes place amongst the men of the community. This practice is how most cultural issues get resolved. Many Tongans living abroad have discovered it is hard to sit on the floor or in a circle, and it is hard to wear the ta’ovala at all times because these practices are not part of the dominant culture. Some places have snow and space is not always available. Living in small apartments or renting does not always allow people to adapt the space to effectively meet their needs. The point is to carry these values in the heart, and leaders need to step up and practice the ‘olovaha to teach the youth the values of their culture.

The Tongan Loving Nature (The Golden Bands)

The internal fishing net of the anga’ ofa (Tongan loving nature) consists of the anga faka'apa'apa, mamahi'i me'a, lototo, and tauhi vaha'a. As I have often said, the hearts of Tongans are their compassionate nature (anga’ ofa) and the Golden Bands that are displayed in the kava ceremony. Keeping these values is very important, because losing them creates darkness in one’s

life and one cannot find the light until they are restored. Living abroad, people must go beyond the reef to find the heart of their culture and restore it in order to see their true identity. King Taufa'ahau and Queen Salote restored the Golden Bands of the anga' ofa out of love and for the sake of their people. In the past few years, leaders in churches and communities have preached and taught Tongan culture in their churches. One program to help reach this goal started in 2016, when I was called to fill the district superintendent position in the Los Angeles region. This program brought about great changes and increased joy and happiness for some Tongan Americans, because they have a better understanding of the heart of their culture. People have celebrated together, danced together, sung together, eaten together, and have gotten along with one another. The heart of one's culture can be stolen by desire, greed, and misdeeds through misunderstandings and by people like the original missionaries, who only thought of themselves when they tried introducing new traditions that would have removed Tongans' cultural identity from them. The people resisted the changes when they were in Tonga, but change is harder to resist when a person is outside their own culture and context.

To Tongans I would say, "When residing abroad, never give up; hold on to your culture and identity no matter what the challenges there are. Do not misrepresent your culture and people, no matter how difficult it may be." In history, the Tongan heart and culture were stolen by darkness, and they must be restored with willingness, understanding, and embodiment. Tongans need to embody their cultural values wherever they are and not just to listen to them taught, watch them portrayed in a film, or read about them. People must claim their identity. There is more to it than merely practicing it on the surface, and Tongans must go deep and understand the imperative of restoring the golden values of their culture. It is essential for one to

get involved with one's community and churches, listen deeply to the stories that unfold, and embody Tongan values wherever they are.

When Tongans migrated overseas, it was difficult to maintain their cultural values and to restore their identity when living in different countries. How could Tongans hold on to the virtues of the Golden Bands when living overseas? This is not a change of culture, but it is a change of heart. It means that wherever people are in the world, they need to carry their culture with them in their hearts and find how it is related to the culture in their new environment. Tongan people do not have to be in a Tongan community to embody their cultural values.

Undoubtedly, if people claim their identity in a different place, they should begin by respecting the dominant culture. Every culture has unique core principles, and they are as valuable as others, but people must understand what the uniqueness of the new culture's values are before claiming the dominant culture as part of their identity. Misrepresentation and lack of understanding often become a problem for Tongans when living outside of their original culture and context. Tongan Americans do not know enough about Tongan culture, and Tongan immigrants do not know much about American culture. These misunderstandings become a major conflict for Tongans in the US. The solution to this conflict is inner-self contextualization.

In perspective, inner-self contextualization is a compassionate movement of becoming the message, not only knowing about the messages, but embodying them with action. The Tongan people contextualized the messages brought by the missionaries and mastered them in reality and in the world, but they have not yet contextualized themselves by embodying their own culture's values. To fully contextualize themselves with the messages of their own culture, they need to do more than just reading or listening to the messages, they need to fully embody

them and lead by example. It is about becoming who they are, feeling their own pain, sharing their tears, listening to others' whispers, and giving others a hand when they need it.

Inner-self contextualization is a call for re-contextualization of minds and hearts, not culture. It requires a self-willingness to go beyond the conservative nature to restore the heart of the culture in a way to best mesh with the new culture. Self-willingness is the power that allows the self to embody one's culture through understanding, awareness, and action. A person's culture is their identity. Practicing it is the key to holding on to the ties to one's identity, and it is the doorway to blend in with any culture. When Tongans enter into a new setting, Tongans must join its culture with the core principles of their own culture. It is imperative to enter the new culture with their loving nature, the anga' ofa. When they arrive in their new context, they should immediately put their core values into play. For Tongans, the new setting will become their new community and they must be a part of that community.

The best way to maintain one's core values is to re-contextualize them internally and to fully embody them when merging with the dominant culture. One example of this is using the Tongan kafa (the loving nature represented in the Golden Bands) to wrap oneself to one's new community internally and through action. First, practice keeping the anga faka'apa'apa and be reverent and respectful of everyone in the new community. Second, practice tauhi vaha'a, or maintaining good relationships with one another, and being generous at all times. Third, practice mamahi'i me'a, zeal and team spirit toward any worthy cause. Celebrate with the community, be a part of it, and become an active member. Finally, practice lototo. Always be ready with a willing heart and mind to do whatever the community calls for.

I believe that practicing these core principles of Tongan culture behaviorally in a different place is not a bad idea at all, because it adds to the community. This fits with the model

of inner-self contextualization, and that is to re-contextualize oneself, one's mind and soul, through understanding and awareness of one's original culture and one's new setting. That is how one carries one's true self, one's cultural and personal identity, within one's heart always. Understanding these cultural aspects and embodying them enables one to gain awareness, including knowledge of one's place and awareness of one's family and the hierarchy of one's community; to gain compassion toward others; and to gain restoration of one's identity as a Tongan. The Tongan anga' ofa is now represented in the ta'ovala, and the Kavei Koula (the Golden Bands) are now symbolized by the strands of the kafa, which Tongans can wear proudly within their hearts and use to wrap themselves to their community through actions anywhere they may go.

Chapter Five

Spiritual Ways of Connecting for Internal Personification

Chapter Introduction

In this chapter, I share my conviction that the inner-self contextualization methods discussed previously are going to be netted together and serve as the most powerful tools to retrieve the heart of the Tongan from the Ocean of the Unknown. This thesis has explored several angles in order to find the best way possible to reconcile the internal family system and to find the best driver, the best decision-maker, and the best fisherman for the job. Perhaps, by doing so, that fisherman will carry the net out beyond the reef and face all its challenges so they can catch the heart of the Tongan and restore it within modern time and space.

In the previous chapter, the inner-self contextualization process was examined using Tongan hermeneutical methods of interpretation as major tools. Since Tonga is a Christian island, Jesus serves as the model of the best driver, the best decision-maker, and the best fisherman for any lost heart. However, for a heart, it does not matter whether profound transformation comes through a sectarian or a non-sectarian approach. If one encounters a higher being that is motivating and helps them to restore their hearts, then that is perfectly okay.

This chapter will provide stories and examples from the Bible and also some wisdom from other scholars who are familiar with the functions of the internal family system. This will provide a way to find the loving and caring voice of the manager, which is the voice of the experienced driver, during a time of exile and when the firefighter is in action.

Section One: The Necessity of Using IFS in Tongan Practical Theology

As I said in chapter three of this dissertation, “Trying to find one definition of practical theology (PT) is a daunting task because of the different ways in which PT can be perceived.

Whether people look at it as a set of skills, as an accumulation of knowledge, or as spiritual intervention, it creates a complex set of concepts and possibilities, any one of which could be emphasized.” In this dissertation, the focus is on my own context as a Tongan pastor and how I discovered the significance of IFS in relation to myself as a practical theologian and in relation to those I serve.

As indicated by Dr. Frank Rogers, “Internal Family Systems Therapy (IFS) is a contemplative, soulful, and non-pathologizing approach to personal healing and spiritual transformation.”¹ IFS not only helps to prepare the inner self for whatever tasks it faces, but it also builds a bridge between an understanding of one’s internal parts and an understanding of the people one interacts with. Nevertheless, within the duties of Tongan practical theology, there are three steps that a practical theologian must follow. However, these steps are not easy to follow when working outside Tonga and therefore create fear for the future of the Tongan culture abroad. These are painful exile steps for the Tongan practical theologian. These steps are considered exile parts because they box a Tongan minister into Western theology and following FWCT guidelines, creating fear in the minister. Thankfully, IFS helps make it possible to reconcile these issues through education and understanding of the self and through completing tasks and serving others.²

One aspect of IFS is looking for self-leadership and integrating every part of the inner group into a well-balanced synthesis, like an internal orchestra with each musician playing in harmony with the others.³ Playing in harmony means balancing the need for each part and being

¹ Rogers, “Psycho-spiritual Approaches to Contemplative Transformation.”

² See Earley, *Self-Therapy*, 200.

³ Rogers, “Orientation to the Course.”

aware of oneself and others before they get drowned out by the other parts. This is not an attempt to build a wall between the parts, but to find harmony with those living around them. To be in harmony with all the parts, each of the parts has to overcome obstacles to reach the fullness of each part's life. It is especially important to focus on helping each part get along with itself first, so each part can be in harmony with the other parts.⁴

The next section will discuss the different steps of PT and how they have been embodied by Tongan people. I will also consider how effective the IFS model is for reconciliation of Tongan issues. I call for Tongan practical theologians to consider the IFS steps and to implement them in their ministry because they will help them navigate the culture in which they are assigned to serve.

The First Step of Practical Theology

Exile

Practical theology in the Tongan context cannot be understood unless the initial transmission of PT is properly introduced. Tongan PT was developed on the foundation of missional influences, which taught the importance of conversion and the infallibility of the Bible. The English missionaries introduced to Tongans their social rankings, leading to a Tongan ranking of power with the king at the top, then the chiefs, and then the people. The Christian gospel was introduced to Tonga less than two hundred years ago, which indicates that PT is a relatively new concept. Tongans were taught that the Christian God is a God of power, judgment, and omniscience. In addition, God is to be related to and worshipped through reverence and awe or fear. Therefore, PT was initially observed as a sacred activity where you are doing your

⁴ Earley, *Self-Therapy*, 27.

sacrificing in the church for God, which was not to be taken lightly or easily changed, but rather demanded conformity.

Firefighter

Tongans believed in and abided by the teachings of the missionaries for the sake of getting along, just as a firefighter would do. Whatever the missionaries said became the new way of life for Tongans as they embraced Christianity into their culture. Therefore, the influence of the missionaries should not to be taken lightly by any Tongan practical theologian. One of the traditions the missionaries introduced was the ringing of the church bell every Sunday and during weekday services. When the bell rings, all stores must be closed, and everyone must walk to church. This is the rule that every Tongan abided by, and it is still practiced today. Compared to the time before Christianity, the sound of the bell is a freedom sound for Tongans.

In the period of darkness before Christianity was introduced, one of the few musical sounds heard was from the kele'a (seashell trumpet), which signaled the king's arrival in a war zone. However, after accepting the missionaries' God and message, a new sound was introduced in exchange for the war sound of the kele'a. This was a new sound of liberation which brought the people of Tonga hope and freedom. Tongan pastors operate to the sounds of liberation when serving in Tonga. Here in the US and other places overseas, there are no bells to ring, and the church services begin at different times, depending on the availability of places where a congregation can meet. The pastor is the first one at the church and is always waiting for the congregants when they arrive. Sometimes the members show up and sometimes they do not. It is hard to decide on a fixed time for church overseas, unlike in Tonga, where every church must begin at a specific time. In the US, some members live far away from the church or work on Sundays and during the weekly services. Pastors who are called from Tonga to serve overseas

face these difficult challenges, and sometimes they refuse to serve the church, or they may fight with their congregation. Some members even leave the church in the US due to these rules, so how can one prepare to deal with these issues?

Managers

Some of the internal family parts suffer from hidden wounds and really all that they need is liberation and care for their needs. People all need to know and to realize their well-being through purifying their mind of its afflictions, cultivating virtue, and gaining contemplative insight into the nature of reality. People need healthy and clear minds, brains, and emotions for a healthy relationship with the inner self and family. The first thing to start with is a willing heart to begin moving toward any passionate movement, without turning away or giving up. One must believe in and have faith in what one does in order to help one continue on in any circumstance, including when one is in exile. Engaging deeply in IFS can ground people's hearts in self-awareness and compassion toward their own inner selves. Providing each part with the knowledge it needs to successfully play its part is the best way to build a strong community. IFS provides the tools and a mind for a healing process to help people reconstruct new routines as a new healing process for life and ministry.⁵

Following the IFS method has reduced my stress related to issues with Tongan American youth and has provided a solid understanding for capturing my heart, which led to more joy within my congregation. The IFS model will help the Tongan practical theologian resolve such conflicts here in the US. With the new understandings Tongans have gained, they are still able to relate to God and worship, but not through reverence and fear anymore. The people now relate to

⁵ Earley, *Self-Therapy*, 112.

God through flexibility and freedom. There is no more fear around following the rules that the missionaries introduced, but rather, people follow the Bible and God with an understanding of their new context and place of worship.

The Second Step of Practical Theology

Exile

For FWCT Tongan pastors, practical theology is determined by the doctrines and the constitution of the church. Regardless of social location, it is the responsibility of the pastor to uphold the practical theology that is approved by the church. Diverging from the institution's practical theology parameters will result in reappointment or dismissal. Therefore, pastors who serve congregations outside of Tonga find themselves in difficult situations, where they need to find a compromise between conservative and liberal or relevant contextual views. Thus, there is a need to go beyond the Church of Tonga to find a path of liberation and helpful spiritual practices.

Firefighter

The purpose of the firefighter is to help a person deal with pain. The firefighter brings the healing power of a contemplative in action. I experienced this healing power as a Tongan living in the US. Living a communal lifestyle, where families live with their children for a long time, is the traditional life of the Tongan. Reflecting on this brought me to a place where I believed that the target point of compassionate movement toward Tongan youth lay with restructuring the *apitanga* (church youth retreat).

In December 2015, I invited some Tongan youth leaders from various colleges and from different religions in Los Angeles, California, to come together. These youth leaders gathered together twice a month and discussed how this *apitanga* might be undertaken. Each time the team

gathered together, I began by sharing a contemplative practice that I had learned at Claremont School of Theology. Remarkably, the youth leaders were able to engage in dialogue about the apitanga without discussing other religious issues. They worked together to draft a rough schedule and decided on the roles of each person. According to the youth, it was important that international students from CST were included because of their experience with both the Tongan and US contexts. So, for the second meeting, I brought international students from CST, and this led to a good beginning.

At each meeting there were some co-facilitators—one from each tradition. It was important for the facilitators to build a relationship with one another beforehand. It was the group's responsibility to develop intimacy among themselves before they engaged in dialogue. Therefore, starting with a contemplative practice was how they dwelt in the spirit of being a team. It was important that they come to trust in each other to avoid creating a conflict that might weaken the team. The structured practice was focused primarily on the safety of the youth and the Tongan community.

This project was based on the youth's strength and wisdom to serve as the tools to bridge the gap of their differences with older generations through creating the apitanga. The plan was to introduce the group to the concept of apitanga, the why and the how of it, through each meeting. The way that these types of discussions were facilitated was through weekly meetings and practices. Each week, the international students from CST would meet with other students from different colleges and youth from different churches who had agreed to be part of the team. The participating students would each have a time to share and would go on to discuss any questions that they might have regarding the compassionate movement. In this way, each group would

learn a little more about other groups' religious traditions. The students also could discuss what they had learned about other traditions and ask any questions that might have arisen.

Within these meetings, the students practiced compassion together, they prayed together, they ate together, and they sang together. The apitanga began with these groups of international students from Tonga and some youth from Tongan American communities. After practicing the compassion practice together for six months, beginning in December 2015, the groups started to visit each other's chapel services once a month, and these visits went on for five months.

The goal set forth for the apitanga was not to make everyone the same, but to celebrate their differences and to learn from one another. Anything that moved them toward peace, especially as Tongans, was welcome; as a growing minority group in the US, they need to have peace. It is important that they have a compassionate movement toward self, others, and God before taking up the cross. The hope of the apitanga is for Tongans to be able to look after each other and to respond to the difficulties of living in the US as a community, with love and care, and not be fighting among themselves.

Another thing that is appealing about this approach is inclusivity. It helped kids and adults who did not feel like they belonged anywhere feel included once again within the Tongan community. Some of these people are not attending any church or are not involved in any religious activity due to the feelings of being oppressed and pushed away by their own people. The apitanga is intended for them to feel that, when they come to this space, they have a place where they belong. Apitanga has opened the doors to others in the community to come and participate in a space where everyone feels welcome.

In Tonga, this kind of apitanga has opened a lot of doors to the community and there is a need to continue pushing people to wear the lens of unity. Here in the US, Tongans need to wear

this lens to allow them to engage and have dialogue with people of other cultures and see similarities and differences, so they can learn from others. This way they can move in a positive direction of compassion and intimacy with others.⁶

Managers

The first Sunday of September 2016 was the first Sunday after the apitanga meetings ended. It was also my first Sunday of serving in the role of district superintendent for the Los Angeles Wesleyan Methodist region. I felt nervous taking on this role for the first time and was focused on reconciling the splits within the congregation. The first step prior to taking on this ministry and teaching the people was to focus on grounding my personal feelings to prepare me to reach others on a deeper level. Members were then asked to stay after the sermon to discuss issues pertaining to the church. The focus of the message I preached was the reconciliation between the resurrected Jesus and his disciples and how people can change from non-believers to a household of faith, cultivate a connection with the sacred, engage their imagination in belief, and invite a new life without seeing physical proof of something. Following the sermon, the congregation gathered together in a meeting to find companions. The meeting started with a prayer in the same way the apitanga started. I brought the congregation to being centered and unblended from all their concerned parts through a practice called “*talaloto*” (speak your heart). This practice might also be called “Taking your PULSE” and speaking it out loud. As everyone felt protected and centered, I began the meeting by explaining the repositioning process within the church and why I was chosen to serve that congregation and district. It was a good and fun

⁶ “The Interreligious Stance of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.),” 221st General Assembly, Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), 2014, <https://www.presbyterianmission.org/resource/interreligious-stance/>.

meeting, and everyone present seemed to understand why I had come. Seeing that the congregation was feeling more at ease with this change, I began befriending the people and showing them that I was there to protect the flock.

Some people attend church without knowing the process, culture, and doctrine; they simply follow by faith. Pastors should always communicate with the members in the right ways by sustaining a relaxed self-awareness throughout their time together. Being immersed in the congregation provided me with a deeper understanding of the situation and how dire healing was needed for those in the congregation. A pastor called to ministry should follow the book and do what is right and not of their own ways, but with caretaking and cultivating a self-presence. People all need the help of God and need to serve others with open eyes, open minds, and open hearts to better learn from each other. They have parts of their own that are longing for freedom from enmeshment, for re-grounding in their self-presence, and for clarity about how to proceed in their lives. People need to clear the pathway for their brothers and sisters who are following them in ministry. They need to listen to others in dual tracks. How do people consider themselves Godly people even when they are not living in a Godly way? However, it was the healing power of contemplation that was witnessed in the meeting. The IFS model of being open and curious, becoming centered, and knowing yourself played a huge role in transforming my life and my congregants' lives during the meeting.⁷

The Third Step of Practical Theology

Exile

As I explained in chapter three, most Tongans would interpret the idea of practical

⁷ Earley, *Self-Therapy*, 73, 92, 112.

theology as a relational action with God as meaning engaging in an act of service or sacrifice. The image of the “suffering servant” fits Tongans’ perception of how they should relate to God. Therefore, laypersons take on a submissive role that is reinforced by Christian teachings emphasizing humility and obedience as foundations of Christian living. PT is not normally discussed by laypersons; it is the domain of clergy. Laypersons generally stick to a Deuteronomistic understanding of service and sacrifice to God as a pathway to blessings, while not engaging in these acts leads to being cursed.

PT is present in all pastoral activities of the Tongan church as liturgy, homiletics, praise, education, care, and spiritual development require some form of action, which is determined by one’s relationship with the divine. Additionally, PT can be seen in Tonga as a country because of its status as a Christian state and the governmental dictum of “God and Tonga are my heritage.” The cognition of God in the everyday life of Tongans is an identity which they carry with them throughout life and which provides direction for how they interrelate with others. This coincides with the notion that PT is not a “branch of theology,” but “a form of theological reflection.”⁸ In this regard, conformity to the church’s tradition of PT is embedded from a very young age, and those who stray from this path are ostracized or deemed un-Tongan.

Firefighter

According to Tangi Kina, a lay leader in the church, the Tongan religions in the US are more focused on the spiritual well-being of the adults within the congregation and how they

⁸ Bernard J. Lee, “Politics and Economics in the Preaching of the Church: A New Testament Rendering of Phronesis,” in *Poverty, Suffering, and HIV-AIDS: International Practical Theological Perspectives*, ed. Pamela D. Couture and Bonnie J. Miller-McLemore, (Cardiff, Wales: Cardiff Academic Press, 2003), 171, quoted in Bonnie J. Miller-McLemore, “Five Misunderstandings about Practical Theology,” *International Journal of Practical Theology* 16, no. 1 (2012): 18, DOI: 10.1515/ijpt-2012-0002.

practice the culture than they are on the youth in the church. They have the youth participating in the programs without knowing the value behind them. The programs, including performing, preaching, and teaching, are done in the Tongan ways and language. According to Kina, “The youth that are still remaining in the church are the ones who are afraid of their parents. Undoubtedly, if we do not act immediately there will be no future for our Tongan church and community here in America or anywhere else. We ought to do something about this matter soon.”⁹

After speaking with Kina, I began to take a serious look into finding out why these embedded cultural issues have become problematic with the Tongans here in the US. Not only that, but to find a way to reconcile them. My research showed me that in the late 1970s and early 1980s, Tongan people found an opportunity to travel overseas. When Tongans landed in the new country of their choice, and after they settled into their homes, the very first thing they did was to look for a church to attend. After a few years, Tongans grew in numbers. As the population continued to grow, the first-generation Tongan immigrants realized that the second generation had become Americanized, because they were born in the US and that is where they attended school. In addition, all the programs in the United Methodist church were done in the English language and followed American traditions and disciplines. Tongan immigrants were afraid of losing their culture and decided that they were big and strong enough to start their own church and develop their own worship style. They split from The United Methodist Church and started their own church called the Wesleyan Methodist Church due to these cultural issues.¹⁰

⁹ Tangi Kina (leader of the Los Angeles FWCT’s women’s group), interview by the author, March 9, 2020.

¹⁰ Taufa, interview, July 14, 2020.

There were many problems with this movement to a new church. First, the Tongan immigrants wanted to abide by the Tongan traditions and use the Tongan language when practicing religion in a different country, context, and setting. Because the second-generation members spoke English and grew up in the new environment, they became unaware of the true values behind Tongan culture. Secondly, all pastors sent from the Tongan conference were trained to serve only in Tonga with Tongans. When these pastors were called to serve overseas without any experience and familiarity with the new environment it became a problem with Tongan Americans. The pastors did not know how to harmonize the two cultures, and that led to issues. They were trying to just do their job. Finally, there were youth who left the Wesleyan Church and started going to other churches because the other churches had youth programs they understood, and there were even youth that moved toward non-Christian faiths.¹¹

Managers

I was called to serve as a district supervisor in Los Angeles during my theological studies, and while serving in the ministry, I noticed that there was a decline of youth involvement in the church. Seeing the decline caused me to be curious about what was causing the trend and led me to investigate further. After studying this case for two years, I discovered that a majority of the youth lost interest in Tongan worship programs and that was the reason they decided to leave the church.¹² There was a part of me that was saying that the youth needed to make a U-turn immediately to return to the church. While taking a course on IFS as a spiritual path at Claremont School of Theology, a theory started to emerge. I began to see the problem through an internal lens, and I realized that the problem was an internal one that had to do with my internal

¹¹ Taufa, interview, July 14, 2020.

¹² Taufa, interview, July 14, 2020.

family system. The professor provided the class with ways to care, to shepherd congregational flocks, and to deal with problems inwardly and outwardly. I understood then that these ways were the solution to my inner problem. Listening to the professor's lessons provided me with a stark realization of the problems with religious Tongans in the United States and how those problems needed to be addressed with care and understanding of my inner self.

As is commonly known, today's reefs become tomorrow's islands; youth are the future of the church. How can people teach the values of their traditions to their children? How can they help prepare their children's spiritual life to face oncoming challenges without becoming overwhelmed? How can people teach their children to make the right decisions in the ocean of the unknown? How can people teach their children the value of faith and religion and inspire them to become self-motivated in the gospel? How can people become better parents and incorporate gospel teaching within the home, so children feel at home at church? These are questions that practical theologians need to work out together to answer for the sake of the youth, so they can feel at home and welcome in the church no matter where they are in the world. People need to lay a strong foundation now, beginning with the preparation of the pastor's deep understanding of their duty. Pastors need to have a solid understanding of the context of the people they are called to serve and create a new embedded theology where both Tongans and Americans can find harmony. With the help of IFS, I have been able to create programs for the youth in my church by focusing on these goals and healing my inner wounded parts.

From my perspective as a Tongan pastor in the US, the rigid conformity required of the FWCT and its practical theology, which emphasizes servitude and obedience, does not sit well with Tongan Americans, who have assimilated to the capitalistic system of liberty and freedom of choice. The conflict between first- and second-generation Tongan Americans is evident in the

exodus of many second-generation Tongans from the church. The heritage of God and country, which is embedded in first-generation Tongans, is also embedded in second-generation Tongans, but with the addition of secular influences promoting critique and liberty. In retrospect, my responsibility as pastor to uphold the traditional PT became a dilemma for those I was there to serve.

This part has provided an account of the influence that IFS had on Tongans when applied to my teachings of the gospel as a Tongan pastor. There is a conflict Tongan Americans face in coming to terms with PT and how it needs to be implemented. Where does the pastor stand? How can people create a PT that encompasses both tradition and social location? In studying different solutions, I determined that the better approach to resolve this problem was to not view it primarily as a problem, but as an opportunity for improvement. The pastor can act as a facilitator for both views of PT by educating both sides without judgment and trusting they have the capacity to understand one another by taking the uniqueness of their views into consideration when searching for a solution. The pastor also reminds congregants that they have common ground in both God and country, but the emphasis of how they enact this relationship may differ slightly. Therefore, it is essential that the pastor is well versed in the social locations of all congregants and has the flexibility to encourage dialogue between the involved parties. It is not the responsibility of the pastor to find the solution, but rather to provide an environment that nurtures individuals to form their own PT to enhance their devotion to God. There is an opportunity to embody IFS as a pathway for Tongan PT internally. Since the decision-making of Tongans is rooted in their feelings and their context of “they feel, therefore they are,” IFS models are the best solution to bring about the profound changing of their heart and the transformation of their lives.

Leadership Issues versus Scholarly Wisdom

In the previous chapter, the physical ways that Tongans show respect for their culture were examined and discussed. In this chapter, the focus will be on some of the spiritual ways of connecting with oneself internally and engaging in personal reflection that have been offered by different scholars from distinct views and methodologies. The wisdom from these scholars serves as a model for inner-self contextualization. Inner-self contextualization is a spiritual way that touches the hearts of Tongans and brings them to a different stage of understanding and awareness. The main problem this dissertation seeks to address is the poor understanding of cultural values among Tongans in the US and in Tonga. This is due to a crisis of leadership, and it has created a multitude of other issues like education for leadership, church and community conflicts, family issues, difficulties with living in a multi-faith and multicultural setting, problems with interpretational lenses, and a huge gap in hermeneutical awareness. These issues were related to the conflicts I experienced as an international student who was serving as a pastor in a completely new context. Fortunately, CST is aware of these issues and provides students with the tools to address them. In this subsection, I will take a look at what scholars have said related to leadership issues and the insights they have for remedying the problems that arise due to conflicts between church leaders and lay people.

Issue One: Education for Leadership

The Tongan theological school is where the ministers within the Free Wesleyan Church of Tonga are trained. However, the social structure and technological systems have advanced over the years, and those changes have impacted the way that people in Tonga learn and find information. The theological education system must change to meet the needs of the twenty-first century. Ministers and lay leaders sometimes do not understand how to deal with new

technology and social changes, and, as Eleazar Fernandez says in *Teaching for a Multifaith World*, “You cannot teach what you do not know.”¹³

In terms of Tongan American churches, a major concern for me was how to best approach issues of diversity, which led me to the question of how theological education programs can help prepare pastors to manage these issues within their congregations. There is an apparent problem within multicultural populations within Tongan churches and communities in the United States due to the lack of understanding related to diverse cultures within church leadership. It seems that there is a hermeneutical gap in understanding and communication for ministers from Tonga when they are appointed to churches overseas. These issues illustrate the need for the training to be upgraded to meet the needs of ministerial work in the twenty-first century.

Teaching for a Multifaith World provides wisdom that will help churches address current concerns and will help the theological education system in Tonga move forward, since the theological school is where all theological teachers, ministers, and Wesleyan church leaders begin their training. The Tongan theological school prepares its bachelor degree students to start careers in church ministry over a four-year period, with eight total semesters. Adding a diversity topic for discussion in each of the first five semesters will help prepare ministers and leaders to better serve in today’s diverse world. These topics could include the following: How can we come to appreciate diversity? What prejudices do we carry with us? Who holds power in our culture and who does not? How can we work against oppression and racism? What structures in our churches work against diversity? Potential ministers need to gain awareness and

¹³ Eleazar S. Fernandez, “Multifaith Context and Competencies,” in *Teaching for a Multifaith World*, ed. Eleazar S. Fernandez (Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2017), 77.

understanding of social justice issues, of the social identities of the students at the theological school, and of church youth involved with social equality. Their duty is not to change the lifestyle of Tongan Americans or to force them into a mold that they deem to be right. It is to change the hearts of the people and make them aware of the values behind Tongan cultural traditions.

Issue Two: Church and Community

In her book *Dear White Christians*, Jennifer Harvey provides readers with the scaffolding of a reparations paradigm.¹⁴ This paradigm is very helpful with members of churches and communities when it comes to building relationships. Introducing this reparations paradigm, Harvey cites a question posed by James McGraw to Vine Deloria Jr., a prominent Native American scholar, in an attempt to synthesize Deloria's book *God Is Red*: "Would it be fair to say reconciliation is what Christians must be about, not reconciling souls to Christ but reconciling themselves to the land?"¹⁵ According to Harvey, this question is in fact a call to reconcile with one another across racial lines.¹⁶ The idea of the land is one that can tear down the barriers between different races: "This land is where white racial identity and Native American identity are constructed in relation to one another."¹⁷ If this is the case, the message is clear enough that people need to first understand, love, and care for their own in order to better care for others. They need to first understand themselves before others in order to find a common ground. Therefore, the reparation paradigm is a call to all to first repair themselves before

¹⁴ Jennifer Harvey, *Dear White Christians: For Those Still Longing for Racial Reconciliation* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 2014), chap. 1.

¹⁵ James R. McGraw, "God Is Also Red: An Interview with Vine Deloria Jr.," *Christianity and Crisis* 35, no. 14 (September 15, 1975): 206.

¹⁶ Harvey, *Dear White Christians*, 163.

¹⁷ Harvey, *Dear White Christians*, 164.

others.¹⁸

Harvey's wisdom is not restricted to the land alone, but it can also repair the racial healing in the church and in communities. This is a call to repair history with good intentions in the work of racial justice to replace time and space with love and care by giving a hand. People cannot erase what has happened in history, but they can do something about the future. People who are whites or call themselves Christians can give education, economic support, equal opportunities, and much more to those of other races that have been denied those opportunities based on race. This is already happening in the US where whites and blacks are enrolling in the same schools, eating in the same restaurants, and playing in the same games. Now Polynesians and Asians are joining in the same multiracial communities. It is not the power of white or the power of black, but the power of Christ in all people. This can bring people to the oneness of humanity as Martin Luther King Jr's theological vision was.¹⁹

No matter what kind of work that people are called to do, they must connect with it, relate it to others and gain joy in doing so. The work that people do is the work that people want to do. According to Gabbard, "Work is not only the expression of our special individual nature, but also the special contribution that we make to the universe."²⁰ This is their offering to God, and it is through the work for the common good of everyone.²¹

Issue Three: Family Issues

In *Reset the Heart*, Mai-Anh Le Tran suggests that readers imagine instructional practices

¹⁸ Alane K. Daugherty, *How Somatic Awareness Can Transform Your Body's Stress Response and Build Emotional Resilience* (Oakland, CA: New Harbinger, 2019), 13.

¹⁹ Harvey, *Dear White Christians*, 34.

²⁰ Harvey, *Dear White Christians*, 117.

²¹ Harvey, *Dear White Christians*, 114-119.

for teaching faith in this violent world. She provides tools to use in Christian education to prepare leaders from educational ministry to teach Christian faith that can transform the world. It offers ways for Christians to live the good news, engage in acts of redemption, and how churches can help the communities in doing so. Tran also provides a way to live deeply in hope and faith during the ministry and journey in this world of violence.

“For many such leaders, the demands for change from the streets are challenging the existing curriculum for faith as a practice.”²² There are many violent actions that have been described in the book’s insight and this can also weaken one’s faith and hope of living the good news. What does it mean to be a person of faith in a violent world? How do people practice faith in such a world that exists today? How can they teach faith in the after burn of violence?²³ Resetting the heart to focus on faith and hope as what people need to teach to all people in all places. After burn of violence victims need people who are present, to make themselves available to comfort them and say that they are here, and they care for them.²⁴ The book believes that violence is taught and learned within the society of negative actions. If this is the case, faith and hope can be also taught and learned within that same social structure through the help of theological education and leaders.²⁵

In *The Stories We Live: Finding God’s Calling All Around Us*, Kathleen Cahalan offers stories of people responding to God’s call in their lives. However, God calls each person, but it

²² Mai-Anh Le Tran, *Reset the Heart: Unlearning Violence, Relearning Hope* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2017), 5.

²³ Tran, *Reset the Heart*, 6.

²⁴ Tran, *Reset the Heart*, 18.

²⁵ Tran, *Reset the Heart*, 22.

does not mean that He will elect all of them to deliver His will. People all have different levels of faith and grace depending on their relationship with God. God can choose anyone to deliver His will to the people. Cahalan shares the story of Walter: “Walter is an actor, comedian, and magician, and he has found that his calling is *for* laughter and healing.”²⁶ His talents heal people and give them joy in their lives. He loves the work that he does. People have been healed and received joy through his talents.

The hard part sometimes with callings is putting everything into action. People need to develop movements that start by offering words, hands, minds, and putting that call into action. It is not all about a person’s self-development, but it is about being faithful to the call.²⁷ This is love and compassion.

Practicing compassion is acting on what the voice of love in one’s soul and heart is telling one to do, just as Walter did, but not from one’s own desire.²⁸ According to some zookeepers, the work that they do is what they want to do. Even though it is hard, dirty work, and they often earn less money, they are also connecting with their calling and there is nothing that can separate them from doing so, not anyone or anything, including money.²⁹ When people respond to their calling, there is no turning back.

Love is a gift from the Spirit and is expressed through different kinds of service. People have different gifts according to the grace given to them. According to Saint Paul, there is only one reason the Spirit gives someone a talent or a gift: to build up the community and from that,

²⁶ Kathleen A. Cahalan, *The Stories We Live: Finding God’s Calling All around Us* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 2017), 32.

²⁷ Cahalan, *The Stories We Live*, 61.

²⁸ Cahalan, *The Stories We Live*, 66.

²⁹ Cahalan, *The Stories We Live*, 63.

the community builds up the common good. Walter used his gifts to give joy, to heal others, and to glorify God.³⁰ People need to act on their calling to love one another with the grace and the Spirit of God. People can show their appreciation for the love that God has given them through Christ by loving others.

Issue Four: Difficulties with Living in Multicultural Settings

In his essay “Pastoral and Spiritual Care in Multifaith Contexts,” Daniel Schipani states that hospitality toward people of other faiths is not a luxury, but a necessity.³¹ In this essay, Schipani makes a particularly important shift from focusing on providing spiritual care for the care-seeker to empathizing with and spending more attention on the caregiver. The essay prepares caregivers to be familiar with how a situation should be handled and how to serve in a multi-faith context. Schipani considers a range of faith perspectives and ways to engage the Spirit in regard to spiritual care.³² People live with diverse cultural and religious traditions within their homes and community. Therefore, Schipani’s insightful messages might not be adequate for all cultures. Nonetheless, Schipani’s work inspired me.

Pastoral caregivers should first be assured of themselves before giving out hope and promise to others. This is important because they cannot change anyone for the best unless they change themselves first, so they must have a good knowledge and understanding of what life means to them.³³ Caregivers need to show care-seekers that they are in a partnership with God in their healing work, regardless of their differences in faith and culture.³⁴ People are all part of

³⁰ Cahalan, *The Stories We Live*, 66-67.

³¹ Daniel S. Schipani, “Pastoral and Spiritual Care in Multifaith Contexts,” in *Teaching for a Multifaith World*, 143.

³² Schipani, “Pastoral and Spiritual Care,” 142.

³³ Schipani, “Pastoral and Spiritual Care,” 144.

³⁴ Schipani, “Pastoral and Spiritual Care,” 143.

creation, and none are more or less important than others because all things originated from the Creator, and He has given love and hope to all people. Everyone needs to work together regardless of race, creed, or nationality, and all are equally important in the eyes of God. People need to be trained in their calling and practice from the heart and not from the head. They must live out the sacred teachings of love, respect, courage, humility, truth, honesty, and wisdom.³⁵

According to Ruben Habito, caregivers ought to have an overview of multi-faith views in spiritual care that invite the Spirit and welcome the Divine presence into the midst of the caregiving relationship.³⁶ People need to mature themselves first before considering helping others from different cultures. They need to always be ready for emergency care by preparing themselves through spiritual self-care and wearing the lens of love. In this way, people prepare themselves to work with all people, regardless of race, faith, nationality, or culture. Leaders need to follow the leadership of the Spirit to lead them to a good outcome in their relationships with self and others as a vehicle to return people to God as revealed in Jesus Christ.³⁷ People need to interact with one another and build multi-faith relationships with others. Spiritual care ought to be rooted in the Spirit; one's spiritual practices are not only important in moments of encountering others, but also crucial to preparation before and after encounters. After all, leaders are shepherds to all living creations, and they need to care for all lives through the lens of love.

More and more Tongan American communities have a stance of being unaccepting of differences, and this has led to tension and fighting in communities, which then has led to greater violence within the Tongan community itself. In the past, gun violence would have been unheard

³⁵ Schipani, "Pastoral and Spiritual Care," 128.

³⁶ Ruben L. F. Habito, "Spiritual Formation in a Multifaith World," in *Teaching for a Multifaith World*, 117.

³⁷ Habito, "Spiritual Formation," 119.

of in Tongan communities, but in the US there are sometimes stories of Tongans shooting other people. This goes against typical Tongan culture and seems to be rooted in an inability to bridge cultures and generations.

The structural practice mentioned above focused on primarily the safety of the youth, and it places a priority on the Tongan community through respect for each other above any religious differences. The focus of the practice would not be on converting, but rather on recognizing each other's common cultural identity and humanity despite religious differences. This will specifically focus on helping Tongans get along with one another first, so that the youth can be friends with one another instead of being violent toward one another. Tongans believe that in order to help the greater community outside of themselves and other cultures, they need to be sure that they can help themselves, and that they are able to get along within their own communities.

In *God Beyond Borders*, Sheryl Kujawa-Holbrook shows leaders how to open their eyes to understand their neighbors in this diverse world, build relationships with others, and engage in interreligious learning. *God Beyond Borders* offers insightful histories, examples of practice in interfaith and interreligious dialogue, and educational processes and contemporary resources that can guide people through any multicultural setting. It can show people how to build a relationship through their differences, find an essential way to live the gospel, and reach a beneficial outcome in the process. That is the goal of *God Beyond Borders* and it should also be the goal of a practical theologian or leader. How can one build a relationship with others as a Christian religious leader? According to Jerry Campbell, Claremont School of Theology

launched the project to improve relationships across faith traditions.³⁸ How can one benefit from another faith's practice and still strongly hold on to their own faith? As Kujawa-Holbrook claims, "There will be peace in the world when religious leaders decide to make peace."³⁹ "How can this love develop if we have no relationship with our brothers and sisters in different religious traditions?"⁴⁰

"The first stage process is for community leaders to prepare themselves for further interreligious learning through study and reflection."⁴¹ Leaders need to mature their own understanding of who they are as a person within their culture before considering other cultures. They should be ready for emergency care by making sure they are prepared to lead with a lens of love.

According to Kujawa-Holbrook, religious pluralism is located where people live, not elsewhere in the world.⁴² Tonga is a Christian island, and everything is rooted in Christianity. As a Tongan religious leader that is serving here in the US, it has become clear to me that there is a lot of diversity when it comes to the number of faiths a person can choose from. Tongan immigrants now have more freedom to choose their faith. Some Tongan immigrants choose to practice a faith other than Christianity. It seems that there are borders that divide the Tongan people and families, churches, and communities that if they remain divided create more conflict. These borders between Tongans are due to the poor understanding of culture and are the result of how unaware Tongans are of trying to merge cultures. The biggest question is what can be done

³⁸ Sheryl Kujawa-Holbrook, *God beyond Borders: Interreligious Learning among Faith Communities* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2014), 17.

³⁹ Kujawa-Holbrook, *God beyond Borders*, 70.

⁴⁰ Kujawa-Holbrook, *God beyond Borders*, 71.

⁴¹ Kujawa-Holbrook, *God beyond Borders*, 74.

⁴² Kujawa-Holbrook, *God beyond Borders*, 17.

about this situation? How can one help them regardless of their differences in faith? Kujawa-Holbrook is providing readers with instructions on how best to begin something like this. “It is wise for the leaders to spend adequate time in discernment, building relationships within the group, discerning what the group hopes to do together, and the resources needed, before jumping into interreligious action.⁴³” Tongan Wesleyan and Methodist members do not want anything to do with Tongans that belong to other faiths. This problem is calling for the leadership’s attention and roles. It is within the Tongan community, families, and churches. These models and methods are providing people an opportunity to help bridge the gap between the Tongans and they can all benefit from its outcome.

Issue Five: Interpretational Lenses

“It is a given in contemporary biblical studies that the texts of the Bible come from and reflect different social locations, cultural backgrounds, economic contexts and political situations.”⁴⁴ Teaching the Bible offers an opportunity and engages the problem of theological education and biblical study in the twenty-first century. It provides essays that are focused on the postmodern, postcolonial, and culturally-enriched challenges that the academy is facing today. According to Segovia, there are four main paradigms or umbrellas of interpretation in the world of contemporary biblical criticism. These four paradigms are historical criticism, literary criticism, cultural criticism, and cultural studies.⁴⁵ When people need liberation, they sometimes turn to the Bible for help and only take the message that they see as a solution to their problem.⁴⁶

⁴³ Kujawa-Holbrook, *God beyond Borders*, 120.

⁴⁴ Fernando F. Segovia and Mary Ann Tolbert, *Teaching the Bible: The Discourses and Politics of Biblical Pedagogy* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2009), 247.

⁴⁵ Segovia and Tolbert, *Teaching the Bible*, 1.

⁴⁶ Segovia and Tolbert, *Teaching the Bible*, 232.

However, true interpretation requires skills and all the methods available.⁴⁷ This will help bring the right message for the right needs.

The implication of the deconstructionism reading strategy is that the very meaning of interpretation has shifted. This approach begins from the observation that interpreters cannot help but interpret texts from the context of their own culture and therefore makes ‘praxis’ their hermeneutical control.⁴⁸ In perspective, one’s interpretative differences are because they have created different texts. The idea here is that one cannot take the gospel that has been consistent within systems of power and enforce it upon a different cultural group, because it becomes aggressive.⁴⁹ As often mentioned, the Christians from outside the Tongan cultural traditions such as the Western white missionaries coming to Tonga in the 1700s. They did not bring gospel messages from their origins in the Holy Land, but rather their own Western messages that were working for them in their own cultural settings, but did not consider transposing the values to match values within the Tongan culture. Not only that, but they also forced the people to abide by foreign rules. However, Segovia and Tolbert acknowledged, “Yet, contemporary hermeneutics has shown that our reading and understanding of the past are deeply influenced not only by the presuppositions and biases of readers, but also by their contemporary sociopolitical and postmodern situations.”⁵⁰

How can one be faithful to the Bible? “There is a need for further studies to re-address the imbalance for the biblical transformation, which has perhaps been shaped by Judeo-Christian

⁴⁷ Segovia and Tolbert, *Teaching the Bible*, 330.

⁴⁸ Segovia and Tolbert, *Teaching the Bible*, 150.

⁴⁹ Segovia and Tolbert, *Teaching the Bible*, 252.

⁵⁰ Segovia and Tolbert, *Teaching the Bible*, 247.

perspectives and understandings.⁵¹” The readers bring their good reasoning to control the meaning of the messages of the Bible. People sometimes only interpret what the Bible teaches to only fit with what their community, church, and lives want, excluding the other messages. They sometimes bring in our good reasoning to control and change the original meaning of what the Bible is truly trying to tell the readers. However, economic, context, culture, social location, and language can be contextualized to how scripture can be interpreted.⁵² The way people interpret or view the scriptures was based on these things and eventually changed the way they view and interpret the scriptural messages.

Tongan ministers need to know how to read the Bible in the proper way in order to understand perspective on the Bible and interpretations of the biblical text. The Bible writers put a lot of time and effort to keep the message true to the readers based on the original documents and translations.⁵³ People sometimes approach the Bible with their own interest hoping that their interpretation is what the reader is supposed to get from the Bible. In perspective, people must put in dedicated time and effort to make sure they are understanding the messages correctly. The right messages may not be the answer to their needs, but it will help them understand the text. Pastors need to read the Bible with the mindset that everyone is equal in the sight of God, and that will help them be more open to the messages contained within the Bible. Tongan ministers and leaders need to look at the text to see the story and its characters in their truest form. Then they need to consider the characters and stories within the historical context and apply the lessons they are trying to teach into the twenty-first century.

⁵¹ Segovia and Tolbert, *Teaching the Bible*, 252.

⁵² Segovia and Tolbert, *Teaching the Bible*, 248.

⁵³ Segovia and Tolbert, *Teaching the Bible*, 247.

Issue Six: Gap in Hermeneutical Awareness

Ways of Being, Ways of Reading offers incredible understandings from a collection of essays that address biblical interpretation and the Bible's role from an Asian point of view. These essays demonstrate how focusing on issues involving race, class, and gender can control one's understanding and interpretations of the Bible. The essays also discuss what constitutes the distinguishing characteristics or sensibilities of Asian American biblical hermeneutics, the issue of community or political identity, women's issues, and the question of why Asian American biblical hermeneutics should exist at all.⁵⁴

The essays in *Ways of Being, Ways of Reading* acknowledge that people may have differences in acceptance and interpretation depending on who they are and how they value and understand biblical texts. The fifteen essays in the book include different materials and sources that exemplify the focus of the book and reveal the love of God in its universality and preferential option for Asian Americans' biblical interpretation. The book begins with the history of biblical interpretation in Asian countries and cultures and then goes into an impressive collection of works by noted contemporary scholars. The book also addresses issues and themes such as cultural hermeneutics, the politics of identity, and what constitutes Asian American theology. According to Gale Yee, "Since the dawn of liberation theology in the 1960s, contextual theology has gained a strong foothold in the academic disciplines."⁵⁵ Asian theologians developed their own theologies within their own social and contextual settings.

⁵⁴ Mary F. Foskett and Jeffrey Kah-Jin Kuan, *Ways of Being, Ways of Reading: Asian American Biblical Interpretation* (St. Louis, MO: Chalice Press, 2006), xi, 152.

⁵⁵ Gale A. Yee, "Yin/Yang Is Not Me: An Exploration into an Asian American Biblical Hermeneutics," in *Ways of Being, Ways of Reading*, ed. Foskett and Kuan, 152.

biblical interpretation in Asian countries began with some younger Asian biblical scholars who wrote their dissertations based on their perspectives of the Bible.⁵⁶

To me, it seemed like all the authors of these selective essays focused on liberating themselves and their people from controversy in the missionary world. They also contradict the notion that when one Asian American speaks, they are a representative that is speaking for or serving as the voice for all Asian Americans. Additionally, the very field of biblical hermeneutics should be open to interpretation. Rather than considering hermeneutics as a means to the end of finding a meaning or interpretation, it can be seen how one can use the biblical text to understand the very basics of meaning or the working of power in the world. What is abundantly clear from this is that contextualization is a method of communication in which a text is transferred between different contexts and made to be more understandable for each of the cultures. In these essays, the first context is assumed to be the original one of the biblical texts. The second context is the context in which the text is to be comprehended by the mind of the interpreter, the reader, or the listener, if the text is the primary source for sharing different theological ideas through missionary work.⁵⁷ Tongan leaders must master the notion of contextualization in order to communicate with their people.

Section Two: Revitalizing Ministerial Training

Traditional and Cultural Issues

The diversity in cultures can mirror the diversity in religions throughout the world. Both

⁵⁶ Andrew Yueking Lee, "Reading the Bible as an Asian American: Issues in Asian American Biblical Interpretation," in *Ways of Being, Ways of Reading*, ed. Foskett and Kuan, 60.

⁵⁷ Frank M. Yamada, "Constructing Hybridity and Heterogeneity: Asian American Biblical Interpretation from a Third-Generation Perspective," in *Ways of Being, Ways of Reading*, ed. Foskett and Kuan, 164.

religion and culture can be described as different things, but some societies like the Tongan culture consider religion and culture as one in the same. This idea of equal liberty between both something man-made such as culture and something of a divine nature such as faith and religion shed light on where people originated from.

I explained the arrival of Christianity and missionary work in Tonga in chapter two, and this story illustrates why the relationship between contextualization and religious leadership is so explosive, persuasive, and dangerous. The missionaries not only tried to plant the gospel but tried to transplant their cultural values to Tonga. The transplanting of the Western values resulted in a major conflict and split the church in Tonga. The missionaries already planned to conquer the native people of Tonga by confusing the system of power and introducing Western values when they shared the gospel of Jesus Christ with the Tongan people. After all, the missionaries were only trying to Christianize Tongans in order to conquer the rest of the Pacific for their goods and values. It was culture versus gospel.

The problem has already happened, and the separation has occurred between the two sides. The ongoing question is whether to abide by the original Tongan culture or to try to blend in with the current foreign culture. People are often comfortable in their own cultural setting and find it difficult to accept new ideas and ways. It is true that God pushes people out of their comfort zones and prepares them to face the world's challenges. People have a duty to serve in the world around them.⁵⁸ The remaining question for leaders to answer is, who are the leaders doing ministry for, themselves or God? It is important to know what to leave behind and what to

⁵⁸ Karen Dalton, Religious Leadership (class lecture, Claremont School of Theology, Claremont, CA, February 7, 2017).

move forward with when leaders are called on a mission or repositioned to another church or context.⁵⁹

Tongan people experienced the conflict of leadership in crisis when the Western missionary leaders arrived in Tonga. However, the Tongan immigrants did not learn from these mistakes when coming to the US. They carried their culture and tried to transplant it to the Tongan Americans who live in a completely different context. Leaders do not need to sugar coat the text with their own desires and good intentions to force people to abide by what they understand and want, but should strive to do so with the truth of scripture, message, and faithfulness to the world.

There is an issue within the church that is causing the members to cease growing spiritually Every day they face the influence of their surroundings in their daily activities and lives. Their learning potential is limited during church services, because of their lack of understanding of their native language, which is Tongan. Viewing these problems through my personal experience has allowed me to come to the theological conclusion that the churches here in the US need a program based solely on the unity and spiritual growth of the members. I would also propose that before the church gets involved with raising the youth, the responsibility should be primarily in the hands of the parents, leaders, and pastors to teach their children in the ways of God.

Theological Education

Theological education is not limited to potential ministers, but is open to all members of the church. Theological education begins in the Sunday schools with an emphasis on children

⁵⁹ Karen Dalton, Religious Leadership (class lecture, Claremont School of Theology, Claremont, CA, March 1, 2017).

memorizing passages and learning to read. A child as young as two or three years of age will start by learning how to recite the Tongan alphabet and the Lord's Prayer. As the child develops, Bible stories and the recital of biblical passages are added. A curriculum is set annually and every year the children are tested through oral and written examinations. Usually, a child will finish Sunday school at the age of eighteen, which should coincide with the completion of their secular education in high school.⁶⁰

Youth fellowship programs are another method for stimulating theological thinking. Within the FWCT, the age group for those that participate is not limited based on age, and it is open to all who feel young at heart in the fellowship with Christ. Youth programs incorporate evangelization through drama, songs, and Bible study. The theological aspiration in youth programs is to blend the present context to the teachings of biblical literature. However, due to the dominance of the older generation, the younger generation feels that the context that is being assimilated is not the current situation, but a romantic ideology of how Tongans might have been in the past.⁶¹

The ministers play a large part in the theological education of those under their care. Days are set aside for Sunday school and youth to have seminars, camps, and worship services. However, most programs for both the Sunday school and youth are initiated and implemented by the ministers. If the minister is successful in creating this environment, his/her parish will be a breeding ground for those who are called to take on further theological education and provide ministers for the future.

⁶⁰ Fale Lomu, "Tohi mahina" [Monthly article], #9 (Nuku'alofa, Tonga: Tonga Press, 2017).

⁶¹ Jemaima Tiatia, *Caught between Cultures: A New Zealand-Born Pacific Island Perspective* (Auckland: Christian Research Association, 1998), 9-10.

In Tonga, 99.5 percent of the people are Christian. The main denomination in Tonga is the Free Wesleyan Church of Tonga (FWCT). There are six other different denominations in Tongan that include the Roman Catholic Church, the Church of Tonga, the Free Church of Tonga, The New Life, the Seventh-day Adventist Church, and the Church of England. However, in Tonga there is only one theological school, and it belongs to the FWCT. The name of this school is Sia'atoutai Theological College (STC), and this school is where the denominational leaders in Tonga usually receive their first theological qualifications, regardless of denomination, if required. It is an undergraduate school, and it offers three qualification programs, which are the certificate in theological study, the diploma in theology, and the bachelor of divinity (BD). The BD program has only been around for a few years now, and it is the only program that is taught in the English language.⁶²

Curriculum

STC is accountable to the FWCT and its members. As an institution that was set up to provide theological training for the people of Tonga, it is mandated to train candidates and leaders according to the traditions, theology, and discipline of the FWCT, with due respect to cultural values, and other denominational and religious traditions. STC is liable to update the FWCT conference annually with the fruits of its calling.

Teaching, learning, worship, and leadership training in STC are all based on the apostles and the Nicene Creed, as well as the founding statements of faith as prescribed by the constitution of the FWCT. STC allows students to dedicate themselves to be agents of change in the lives of people of God and to continue to interpret this faith in life. These same students are

⁶² Tiatia, *Caught between Cultures*, 9-10.

provided with a successful collaboration of academic competence, Wesleyan traditions, spiritual eminence, and Tongan cultural values.⁶³

The curriculum for STC is regulated by the FWCT conference, but faculty and staff implement and propose any alterations needed. It is also possible for individual members to make motions through the district quarterly meeting for the conference to make changes to the curriculum.⁶⁴

Formation

Academically, STC follows the four-fold pattern of theological studies, which includes biblical studies, theology, church history, and practical theology. STC also provides candidates with the opportunity to build a firm foundation with all the programs in the church, each religious education department, and the preparation of all pastors to serve in the field. In the FWCT, all pastors must go through the STC candidate process and must receive a certificate in theological studies to practice. All pastors are trained to serve the congregations in the villages and in all the church's religious departments. They are trained to work for the Tongan people in Tonga and abroad.⁶⁵

Advanced Ministerial Training

Candidates for advanced ministerial training are elected by individual local churches. It is usually someone who has already completed his or her theological training at STC or a trustworthy and dependable person who has proven themselves within the church. After the

⁶³ Taliai Numeitolu, "STC Handbook" (Tongatapu, Tonga: Sia'atoutai Theological College, 2005).

⁶⁴ Numeitolu, "STC Handbook."

⁶⁵ Viliami Vao (STC admissions student assistant), interview by the author, December 5, 2021.

church decides on a candidate, their name is brought forward to the district quarterly meeting in December. Once the district receives all the candidates from each church then they will vote according to the number of candidates that have been designated by the President of the FWCT for the district. The names of those who are elected by the district will then be taken to the main conference in June and the president will once again announce how many minister slots are open in the church for that year.⁶⁶ All senior ministers will then elect those who will become probationary ministers and undertake advanced ministerial training.⁶⁷

Probationary ministers who have not completed a certificate in theological studies must go back to STC and do a three-year study for their certificate, and one year in ministerial training as part of their requirements. Ministers who have already completed their theological certificate are required to do one year of Advanced Ministerial Training preparation before they can serve a village. After two years of serving, they are entitled to ordination. Advanced Ministerial Training is where they prepare the ministers for all four corners of their ministries. This training is done in both Tongan and the English language.

There are some elected ministers who are trained to serve the king and the royal family. They are trained to serve the middle class, which are the chiefs, and their families and the rest of the people on all levels. However, the school prepares ministers and leaders to serve in Tonga and overseas. Therefore, not all ministers and leaders who are serving overseas have this training from STC. Since there are more churches overseas than there are in Tonga, there is a call for the

⁶⁶ Kolo Tapu, “STC One Year Advanced Ministerial Training Handbook” (Tongatapu: Sia’atoutai Theological College, 2010).

⁶⁷ Tapu, “One Year Advanced Ministerial Training Handbook.”

people and Tongan conferences to elect leaders who have completed their leadership training to serve in the churches and communities abroad.

Appointment Process

The first job of every minister is to complete the STC training requirement. After the theological study requirements are completed, they will be called to serve in a congregation. The repositioning of the ministers in different villages is done annually. The villages are ranked from numbers one through four according to size and number of members within the village. The ministers are also ranked from one to four based on how many years that they have worked within the church. The top ministers will be repositioned or appointed to a number-one ranked village and then all other ministers will be appointed afterwards.

The number one level minister has served in a church for over twenty years, the number two ranking minister has served for fifteen years, the number three ranking minister has served for ten years, and the number four ranking minister has served less than a decade. The ministers from the number one ranking are usually elected for a district superintendent position and other leadership roles within the church.

As churches began to grow overseas, the Tongan conference started sending ministers from Tonga to look after those churches. However, it is hard to rank churches overseas because people move to different areas from time to time. Therefore, whenever a church that has the number one ranking minister sent to it, making it the head church of that district, suddenly loses members, it registers as a problem.

In addition, it is hard to do a yearly appointment in the US due to the high expenses of travel and relocation. The ministers who are appointed to the US are the ones who have access to a visa, and because it is limited, there are only a few who are available to work in the US. Most

of the ministers who work in the US are retired ministers, who have work permits for the United States. Other ministers who are sent to the US have little to no experience in working in another context different from Tonga. Sometimes the repositioning of ministers in the US is due to problems between the minister and church members, but it seems that they are only perpetuating the problem by sending them to their new appointment. The reason behind this is that none of the ministers are well educated or have enough training to serve diverse contexts. Due to these problems, most churches have split and are now crying for help. It is recommended that all ministers who are called to serve overseas regardless of their denomination should at least complete the training in STC. This will reduce the issues in the place that they are called to serve.

What is the Purpose of a Tongan Minister?

A major issue that needs to be defined is what the true purpose of a minister is. One might critique the possible downfalls of ministers, but unless there is a sound foundation on which they can reconstruct their roles, they will continue to fall short of their potential. For this reason, attributes have been selected to give more understanding toward revitalizing the role of the Tongan minister, which are stewardship in leadership.

Undoubtedly, history will not only continue to repeat itself, but the Tongan people will always face these conflicts in churches overseas. However, it can cause the Tongan culture, faith, identity, and the context of the country in which they worship to provide a more relevant message. These images of crisis are calling for the leadership of FWCT to pay attention today. Leaders ought to be faithful to the people that God has called them to lead and that is the purpose of their task.

Recommendations for Ministerial and Leadership Training

STC offers courses focused on religious education, Christian education, pastoral care, leadership, and more. It not only focuses on educating ministers and leaders to serve in Tonga, but to serve in a world of difference. It would be helpful to discuss ways of introducing to leaders to experiences and knowledge of contexts outside of Tonga in which many of them will serve.

STC started the BD program, which emphasizes research and teaching in the English language, and that program has the capacity for their candidates to reflect analytically on modern issues so they become more tolerant and flexible in diverse situations. There is a need to modify the rigid and traditional methods, which are not applicable to today's context. Therefore, other resources or lectures are needed to provide Tongan leaders with the skills needed to make such modifications.

In addition to classes, there are also other requirements for all pastors to complete in order to graduate with a certificate in theological study. They must specialize in dealing specifically with youth development, leadership, or pastoral care in other contexts different from Tonga. There are more effective programs, like fieldwork for their Advanced Ministerial Training program, where the candidate spends at least two months in a different country to experience contextual differences in ministry.

To offer a solution in this matter, I suggest three approaches for healing. First, that all pastors, including local pastors abroad, receive a diploma in theology or a bachelor's degree, at least from STC. The reason for this is to educate them in knowing other contexts that are different from their own, and to be familiar with how others practice their faith. Second, each pastor should take a leadership class at the Wesleyan district station overseas, where all their

ministers have been educated from STC. This will help prepare pastors to work outside the Tongan context and be able to relate better with the youth. Lastly, if a local Methodist pastor wants to seek ordination, then they should be allowed to go back to Tonga and earn a certificate of theological study from STC. This will help the church leaders prepare for their tasks, and they can create programs for the youth that are relevant to the context they are in and their interests.

STC programs are taught by those professors who have studied overseas and are familiar with foreign situations. God will bless those who are in such roles of leadership, and God will provide them with power to define learning goals and learning processes that will help ministers successfully implement them within their ministry. There are students from the US, New Zealand, and Australia attending STC. They have introduced the issues with the churches overseas, and they are working with Tongan scholars to create programs that they think are appropriate in foreign contexts.

Nevertheless, people need to lay a strong foundation, and this begins with the preparation of their pastors related to their leadership duties. Those going through theological education programs will face many challenges during the preparation process, and it is a big step for pastors to further their education to earn a certificate of theological study or a Bachelor of Divinity degree. These programs allow pastors to learn another context separate from the Tongan culture, to learn the English and Tongan languages, and to participate in other programs.

When pastors who are called to serve in the villages of Tonga are educated in diversity, they will educate the people in the villages to be aware of other environments different from their own. This will be useful for people in the village who are contemplating moving overseas, so they are well equipped with knowledge of the possible hurdles they might face. Another benefit

of the BD program is the opportunity to build alternative scenarios, which can bring to life dormant traditions.

The pastors graduating from the BD program and those who are proficient in the English language are better prepared to serve the Tongan people in any environment. This may seem conflicting or biased now, but in the long run of the church, this new prototype will help the church to become a unified church again. It will help people reconcile the poor understanding of their cultural values caused by generational gaps. By doing so, the youth will once again enjoy being in church, parents will be less worried and stressed, and it will restore happiness within the church. The church will once again become enjoyable, and embody the meaning of being one big family that is related through the blood of Christ.

Chapter Conclusion

The statement made in the beginning of this study was related to the training of ministers and how it is insufficient for practicing ministry in the twenty-first century. They need further education and training to gain awareness of not only their own context, but other contexts they are called to serve. This research pointed out issues faced by church members overseas. It has also determined key factors which have contributed to the problem. The question is, what can be done to address these issues?

When Jesus began his ministry, he came across Simon Peter who had returned from a fishing expedition with no fish. Surely, Peter was discouraged and upset because fishing was his livelihood. When Jesus interacted with Peter and realized Peter's dilemma, he instructed Peter to go out into the deeper waters. After some deliberation between Jesus and Peter, the boat was taken out to the deep. The rest of the story indicates that he brought in a catch that could not be hauled in, let alone carried on one boat because of the abundance of fish (Luke 5:1-11). Other

accounts of this story (Matt. 4:18 & Mk. 1:16) claim that Jesus was by the lake of Galilee while Peter was casting his net from the shore; this indicates Peter was originally fishing in the shallows.

There are many important messages for the church in the account of Jesus and the beginning of His ministry. It tells leaders that they cannot remain inactive with the issue of pastor and membership conflicts. It is essential that leaders get to the depth of the issue. This means giving it all to find a solution and therefore, the church must learn from the challenges of the ministry in its present state. The problems are deep. In order to catch the problem and restore faith, leaders need to go beyond the surface and address the deeper problems.

Chapter Six

Conclusion

One goal of ministry is to tear down the wall of indifference in bicultural settings by providing understanding through education. The focus in leadership is on inclusivity through bridging the indifference and not leaving anyone behind. The purpose of ministry is to provide a voice to the voiceless in society, make them understand who they are, and provide a spotlight to those that are unseen. Leaders ought to be faithful disciples during the fulfillment of their vocation, otherwise their task is nothing more than just labor for money. They must embody compassion every day by walking the walk, giving a hand to Tongans in need, and liberating those in the margins who have poor cultural understanding.

Understanding the core principles of IFS has changed my life forever. It has transformed my life and prepared me for the important tasks ahead. My heart is filled with compassion toward my people, and I want them to experience the transformative power of IFS and how it can help save lives. The most important contribution toward others in the future is to put my thoughts and the wisdom of IFS into action and to move with compassion toward others. The table should be prepared in a way that everyone is included. Relying on the teachings of the Bible as a guiding light will help people find shelter under the direction of the Holy Spirit.

It is important to understand the purpose of vocation when one serves in a leadership role and the meaning behind the words and concepts one intends to convey. A calling is something that cannot be known by a person unless God chooses to reveal it to them, which may be done in many ways, even from a television in a hotel. People ought to believe their calling when they hear it. It is our generational task to build a spiritual house for the safety of people's hearts. It is

most important to act on a calling to show that one is a leader and to inspire others to become leaders.

Finding perspective through a Christian lens has shown me that leadership has to be built on the foundation of the rock, which is Jesus Christ, and should be rooted through the direction of the Holy Spirit. Leaders understand that their duty is to lead and to care for those who are in physical and spiritual need and to teach them to also hear the calling to lead others and to follow Christ. How, then, can a leader lead those who need help? How can they hear their crying from every level and dimension of their lives? How can they see them? People who cry for helping hands and guidance are everywhere, and helping hands are all around in families, communities, churches, states, countries, and all over the world. According to Cedrick Bridgeforth, “Leaders listen, leaders help, leaders make room for others to lead, leaders share what they have, leaders give of who they are so others come to know who they can be, not so they can be like the leader, but so they can become leaders.”¹

CST has been greatly empowering in my vocational journey. This school engages students in what they learn and helps them develop intercultural understanding. It impacts them to think and act as great leaders in a diverse multicultural and religious world. The knowledge and wisdom I have gained from CST have enlightened me in my ministerial tasks.

Growing up in a very conservative Christian religious environment, where my parents wanted me and my siblings to be faithful to one another in the name of Jesus Christ, I developed a love and reverence for God. Christianity is the major religion in Tonga. My mother is a faithful religious woman. When I was a child, she taught me how to pray before meals and before going

¹ Cedrick Bridgeforth, *20/20 Leadership Lessons: Seeing Visions and Focusing on Reality* (n.p.: 323 Publications, 2017), 46.

to bed, and she taught me to memorize Bible verses. She frequently reminded me that she always carried me to church during the week and to Sunday services when I was a baby. When I grew a little older, I remember attending Sunday school and hearing from the teachers that “Jesus was the Redeemer of the world.” The teachers would show us children images and films about Jesus Christ and tell us stories of how Jesus has saved the world.

Despite growing up in a Christian household, I did not know my calling was to serve Jesus Christ. When I became older and entered college, I had to ask myself, what is my purpose in life? My first priority growing up was to go to church, but I was not yet fully committed to Christianity. Later in life, I decided to follow my own desires and to do things in my own way. However, I felt that something was missing in my life, which led me to an undergraduate program at the theological college in Tonga. My mother’s voice was the influence that brought me back from exile. I felt like I was just going through the motions of life while in school, because I had not yet found my purpose in life. I did not realize that attending the theological college was already a step toward my calling to God’s ministry. While attending the theological college, the pathway toward my calling began to unveil itself. Thus, the vocation and purpose that I had been searching for revealed itself, and I began to understand my calling more. In fact, my mother told me that she had prayed that I would dedicate my life to God’s ministry while I was still in her womb. With that knowledge, I discovered that my calling had begun in the womb. I believed that I was placed by God in Tonga as a foundation for my pastoral journey. If children take a moment to remember the wisdom and words of their parents, they can start knitting them together as a fishing net to go out to the Ocean of the Unknown and fish for the hearts of the lost. This is the true value of their culture that has been hidden and has been unveiled to them over the years.

After graduating from Sia'atoutai Theological College in Tonga, I was introduced to Claremont School of Theology in California. I applied to this school and was accepted. As I already mentioned, I was raised and rooted in conservative Christianity. However, coming to CST was one of the many blessings of my vocation. This school served as the confirmation of my calling. It deepened my theology to be a more deliberate theologian. Thus, it has extended my ways of thinking through the concepts and knowledge I have learned from the lecturers. These understandings have enabled me to remove the boundaries and exclusivist thinking I grew up with. CST gave me the privilege of embracing my cultural context, despite being from a different tradition, and the school taught me that marginal voices matter. CST has been a significant community that has given me creatively transformative tools for my body, mind, and spirit. The school has enabled me to branch out to other people in their surroundings, regardless of differences in class, cultural ethnicity, and gender. CST teaches diversity as harmony and encourages people to be transformative agents to the world. Most importantly, it strengthens their faith as Christians and increases their passion for their own religious and cultural traditions. This institution offered more than I expected and enlightened my thoughts so I can carry out the knowledge that I have learned to help the Tongan people.

As a multicultural and interfaith institution, CST has guided me to see that my calling is to help Tongan people after I graduate, to engage in building bridges to nurture inclusivity, and to create understanding of Tongans' hidden cultural values. The goal is not to make everyone the same, but to celebrate differences by finding common ground in understanding and awareness. Anything that moves toward peace should be shared with people. It is my purpose to help those who do not feel like they belong anywhere. Understanding people's differences is the common ground that will open the door to everyone finding unity, regardless of their differences in faith,

race, and gender. Overall, one of the greatest lessons I learned is the importance of religious and cultural awareness. Learning about people who seem different and being able to work past these differences to just focus on the common ground creates a stronger bond with humanity.

The root of the main problem within the church in the US is the inability of the church conferences in Tonga to recognize the need for leadership adaptability and flexibility when dealing with Tongans who live outside of Tonga. There is a need for the churches in the US to create programs and activities that are relevant and empowering for Tongan American churches. In chapter three, I addressed the inability of Tongan American churches to create relevant programs and activities, and I indicated that this resulted in many youth leaving their churches when they come of age. Members of Tongan American churches who are educated in a social location that embraces critical thinking and independence are unable to integrate into the social milieu of the Tongan church.

All Tongan pastors have been educated in the Tongan context for Tongan people. However, most of them have not been educated in cultural differences. Some of the Tongan church's context is tethered in a patriarchal system, where children can only observe, respect, and listen. Children do not have the opportunity to voice their opinions or exercise their rights, and Tongan church leaders view children as only capable of learning, not forming their own opinions and thoughts. When Tongan traditions are introduced by pastors in locations outside of Tonga, where the cultures emphasize and teach individuality, freedom of speech, and voicing personal opinions, children feel excluded and marginalized by the church. Eventually, this causes them to seek alternative means of worship where they feel included and valued. When these types of crises happen, the youth and future generations are no longer interested in learning about their Tongan culture. The justification for their exit represents a theological stance that, as a part

of the body of Christ, the youth deserve to be included. Therefore, in order to highlight this problem, leaders must understand the embedded theology of the Tongan churches and the need for an intentional theology that incorporates the life-giving needs of TACs.

It is important for ministers and church leaders to fully grasp the very essence of the tasks given to or set before them. This essence is to understand their own actions and the actions of God's people by first showing compassion, love, and care toward others, regardless of their differences. Their main duty is to instill the gospel in the hearts of people through speech and action and to provide them with true cultural understanding. Their duty is not to change people's lifestyle and culture or force them into a notion that the ministers and leaders believe to be best, but it is to change the hearts of the people. Throughout this dissertation, IFS has been used as a transformative tool, and solutions have been explored to find the best way for leaders and pastors to teach in a way to help people fish for and help restore others' lost hearts.

The church is not healthy as it steadily decreases in population. If church leaders continue to allow conflicts to go unresolved, then there is no telling how long the churches will survive. The spiritual lives of Tongan church members in the American district are being jeopardized, which means their trust in God will weaken or change. Unless the church invests in its members today, the decrease in membership numbers will escalate. This dissertation has introduced many methods for leaders to utilize, and they should be sufficient to help Tongan people live in harmony.

In order to demonstrate fairness in representing different views, I have tried to give members of the Tongan church, community, and leadership the opportunity to voice their concerns so problems can be addressed. After I introduced the IFS model to the community and churches, the leaders and members were surprised and agreed that these models had a

transformative power. By utilizing these models, I wanted to raise awareness of how the traditional and embedded theologies in the church are damaging the relationships between the pastors and youth within Tongan American churches. My suggestions of intentional theological changes were offered as a way of giving life to not only Tongan American churches, but to Tongan churches at large.

Being able to hear different perspectives will be a strength for leaders because, although Tongans have lived in bicultural contexts, they still see their hearts connected as islanders. Although I come from a conservative Christian background and value the culture I come from, I also believe in inclusive teaching as a true representation of the body of Christ.

Since the main problem discussed in this dissertation is an ongoing issue, I have been providing practical models from different scholars to Tongan leaders and the community. I consider the insights from practical theology helpful in preparing Tongan practical theologians and community leaders for their tasks ahead. This dissertation seeks to show the need for pastors and leaders to grasp the truths of life and their actions and to show people that they are in a partnership with God in the process of healing, regardless of their differences in faith and culture. All are a part of creation, and all are equal in the eyes of God. People need to work together with others, regardless of race, creed, and nationality, and understand that all are equally important in the eyes of God. They need to be trained in their callings, practice from the heart and not from the head, and live out the sacred teachings of love, respect, courage, humility, truth, honesty, and wisdom.

Elaine Graham names the very truth of how pastors should care for creation as shepherds: “One of the most enduring images in the history of Christian pastoral care is that of the pastor as shepherd: courageous, charismatic and solicitous. Yet increasingly, contemporary voices have

spoken of their reservations at such a heroic model, which to present-day tastes appears authoritarian and paternalistic.”² It is especially important for pastors and leaders to be confident in themselves before giving out hope and promise to others. This is important because they cannot change anyone for the better unless they change themselves first, and they must have a good knowledge and understanding of what life means to them personally.

This dissertation has introduced inner-self contextualization as a call for the re-contextualization of minds and hearts. This call is a self-willingness to go beyond the reef and restore the heart of the culture in the best way that allows a smooth integration between cultures. Self-willingness is the power that allows the self to embody the self’s culture through understanding, awareness, and action. There is no doubt that one’s culture is integral to their identity, and practicing and understanding one’s culture is the key to revealing one’s identity; it is the doorway to blend in with any culture that one chooses to live in. When Tongans enter into a new setting, they must find a way to adapt to the new culture’s core principles. This dissertation has provided internal ways of doing so through enlightenment from IFS. It is imperative to enter a new setting with the Tongan loving nature, or anga’ ofa. This is an internal movement of compassion. When they arrive at their new context, they should immediately put their core values into play, and they will, without any question, help a Tongan merge with another culture. For Tongans, the new setting will become their new community, and to be a part of that community is to re-contextualize themselves by embodying their core values to the fullest.

² Elaine L. Graham, *Words Made Flesh: Writings in Pastoral and Practical Theology* (London, UK: SCM Press, 2009), chap. 3, “Symbols and Metaphors of Pastoral Care.”

To Tongans I say this: First, practice keeping faka'apa'apa and be reverent and respectful toward everyone in the new community. Second, practice tauhi vaha'a, maintain good relations with one another, and be generous always. Third, practice mamahi'i me', zeal and team spirit, toward any worthy cause. Celebrate with the community, be a part of it, and become an active member. Finally, practice lototo, being always ready with a willing heart and mind to do whatever the community calls for. Practicing the core principles of one's culture in a different place is not a bad idea because one is contributing one's best to that community. Re-contextualizing oneself, heart, mind, and soul, through understanding and awareness of one's original culture is how one can carry one's true self, culture, and personal identity within one's heart always. Knowledge of these cultural aspects and embodying them enables one to understand one's place, to be aware of one's family and the hierarchy of one's community, to be compassionate toward others, and to restore one's identity as a Tongan. The Tongan anga' ofa, the Golden Bands, and the kaveikoula are now the ta'ovala for you to wear proudly within your hearts anywhere you may go. It is not always necessary to wear the ta'ovala around one's waist, but one should wear it within one's heart by embodying the Tongan Golden Bands in action. These understandings are the blessings of catching and restoring lost hearts.

Furthermore, Tongan leaders in churches and communities need to step up and teach through dialogue and interaction with their people. They need to speak in the language that the youth understand and teach them the truth. They need to communicate effectively with youth by using the language they understand. They need to know who they are dealing with, and they need to know that language is the most important thing when it comes to communicating with their members and youth. Recognizing that the Tongan language is challenging, because there are three different social classes in the Tongan culture that require different language when

addressing people in them, can help leaders provide compassion for one who is not well versed in this language. However, the significant roles of *talanoa* (telling a story) and *talanga* (dialogue) can help bridge the hermeneutical gap of communication and cultural misunderstanding. There are many ways that have been introduced in this dissertation that can work for Tongans, regardless of time, place, and generation.

This dissertation has proven that there are answers and methods to bridge the hermeneutical gaps of poor understanding of Tongan cultural values among Tongans. Chapter one illustrated how I discovered the necessity of a model that helps and guides Tongan people when they are fishing for their hearts in the Ocean of the Unknown. I provided examples of the IFS model at its best and when it functions within people's lives, including the reasons that convinced me to put this project together. Chapter one also provided examples of the healing power of IFS for the inner self, and why I believe it is relevant to people's lives and the ways they live. I provided Tongan life stories and examples of how understanding the inner self has shaped my life personally. Finally, in chapter one I answered the question of why the inner self-contextualization model is believed to be the best fishing net for the restoration of the Tongan heart in the Ocean of Unknown.

Chapter two focused on Tonga and took readers back to the history of Tonga and the reasons behind why Tongans' hearts are so big. Looking at the hardships that Tongan people have gone through in trying to weave together Western culture and the biblical messages from missionaries with their own Tongan traditions and lifestyles showed the conflict and stress this effort caused within the Tongan people. The chapter introduced the true history of the Tongan people and how they found their current culture, faith, and identity. It also discussed customary

Tongan issues through introducing several case studies involving social rankings, class, culture, theology, churches, and communities.

Chapter three took readers to the United States to see and learn about the lives of Tongans in the US. It provided understanding of the conservative and traditional Tongan culture and how it has affected Tongans' lives in the US. It specifically focused on the Tongan people living and attending churches in California. I explored the issues that Tongan leaders have faced while living abroad, and I talked about how and why these problems first occurred, along with providing evidence that the heart of the Tongan has never left Tonga. I also showed the reader why I believe the hermeneutical gap in the US is a spiritual gap. Overall, the chapter proved that the heart of the Tongan needs to be contextualized to modern times. Tongans' conservative traditions have affected their lives, their culture, and their faith in the past and now. The meaning and values behind their cultural gifts, hierarchical classes, and their celebratory nature was explored, and I offered solutions to challenges Tongans face when living overseas.

In chapter four, I provided evidence that the old method of contextualization is irrelevant to current spaces and time. There is a need for Tongans to contextualize themselves into their new world in the contemporary time. In this chapter, I brought forth some Tongan hermeneutical methods of interpretation and suggested them as the perfect tools for inner-self contextualization. I provided understanding of the Tongan hermeneutical methods of interpretation to serve as tools to build a connectional bridge between generations. I believe these methods are the best tools to facilitate profound changes for the Tongan heart through inner-self contextualization. In this chapter, I proved that, in order to fish for the heart of the Tongan, leaders must build a safe, familiar, comfortable, and trusting environment so the heart can go back and forth in space and time.

In chapter five, I showed how well the previously discussed models can function in the life of a person—how they will help connect one’s physical self with their inner self to prepare them to connect with their world. I provided enlightening theological implications and suggestions for the future, including methods and wisdom from different scholars to help leaders with their tasks on their ministerial and leadership journeys. I also provided a new lens and new mindset for Tongan leaders to see things more inclusively by using stories and examples from the Bible and from other scholars who are familiar with the functions of the Internal Family System (IFS). The stories and examples from the Bible served as a pathway to help people find the loving and caring nature of Tongans, a nature that can be seen throughout cultures and people across the US, like the voice of a manager or the voice of an experienced driver in exile or a firefighter in action. These all lead to the true heart of a Tongan.

Appendix

Interviews

The lay leader in my current church has been with the church since it first opened and is a former student of Sia'atoutai Theological College of Tonga. The lay leader is the father of fourteen children and he and his children have witnessed the church's conflicts. Bill recently lost his wife, who helped him a lot with his role as the lay leader of the church and the raising of their children. He understands very well the differences between our customary culture and the context of the US. The interview was done in the Tongan language and has been translated below.

The second participant is a member from another church who had attended our church the previous Sunday for her nephew's baptism. During the service it was announced to the congregation that if anyone had any family issues or concerns, they could make an appointment to see the pastor. The following morning Mrs. Lose called and requested time to speak with the pastor about her concerns.

First Interview

Rev. Sekeni 1: Welcome Bill, it is so good to see you again, please take a seat.

Mr. Bill 2: Pastor, thank you and I mean thank you for having me here today. You do not know how much I appreciate and excited for this opportunity.

Rev. Sekeni 2: thank you Bill. I am grateful myself for this opportunity and it is a great pleasure having you. (Brief silent) Do you want to share your excitement?

Mr. Bill 3: Of course, faifekau (pastor), I have been waiting for this opportunity for a long time. I have been watching the church grow since it was first started. Every four years' pastors have been repositioned. They come and go. I have witnessed how different they offer

pastoral care. At first, it was a joyful church, the programs for the youth were enjoyable. At the same time, I was realizing the differences in how each pastor offers their spiritual care task. When they called the retired pastor from Tonga, everything in the church started to fall apart, he cut down all the youth programs and only focused on the adults. He enforced the dress code and all the customary rituals from Tonga to be practiced here in America. Pastor, when the church split, I tried my best to hold on to my children and the youth, but the majority of the youth decided to seek care elsewhere (brief silence and he was very emotional at this time)

Rev. Sekeni 3: (I was emotional myself also) Bill, I feel you and I hear you. As I was listening to your concerns, I can imagine the faces of those youths who have left the church. After you experienced these conflicts, what was your heart saying to you? And what was your feeling at that time? (Brief silence)

Mr. Bill 4: Pastor, thank you for asking those questions, it is not a day goes by that I do not feel my children (he was talking about the youth as a whole) crying for help. I pray every day for God to help restore and bring the church back to the joyful church that we used to know. Pastor, I think that you are the answer for our prayers.

Rev. Sekeni 4: Bill, I believe in what you said that I was called here for a purpose (at this time I did not want to say anything to offend his belief) (he believes that I am the answer to their prayers. I did not know what he meant by it, so I asked a question). What makes you believe that I am the answer for your prayer?

Mr. Bill 5: Since you have been repositioned to our church. You have been listening to us and have a special attention for the youths that makes us feel that our children are safe around you. Not only that Pastor, but we realized that you have experience in dealing with the youth in

the context that we are in now. However, we can see that you can help bridge your care to those youths that have left the church.

Rev. Sekeni 5: Bill, I thank you very much for your trusting in me, and I appreciate the fact that the congregation believes that I can do this for the sake of our youth. After all that is my duty as a pastor to liberate and heal those who are crying for our helping hand. I will do my best to reach out to our children that have been lost from the flock. I believe that God will help me by strengthening me and give me knowledge to care for our children, and I promise you Bill that we are going to work together to solve this problem once and for all. Is there anything else that you want to share? (Brief silence)

Mr. Bill 6: Yes! Pastor there is one other thing. You know I was in the Tongan Theological College in 1986 and graduated in 1988. I understand that our pastor's requirements are to receive a certificate in theological studies. I do understand that our ministers are trained to only work in Tonga for the Tongan people. They are not being educated to gain awareness of another culture and setting, since overseas is now part of their care they should upgrade the pastor requirement to the Bachelor of Divinity. The reason for this Pastor is that the BD program is done in the English language. This will allow pastors to gain awareness of a different culture.

Rev. Sekeni 6: (Brief silence) Thank you very much Bill, I have never thought of this. I believe that this will work because the problem within the church here is that the pastors are not familiar with how to deal with the context. I will write a letter to the Tongan Religion Board of Education and inform them of our concerns. If they consider this matter, we will witness success in the next four years when the next pastor is repositioned here.

Mr. Bill 7: Thank you very much Pastor for listening and your consideration of this matter.

Bill's concern was to find a way to restore what was lost from the church. Of course, the youth are their children that they need to hold onto spiritually. Bill thought the pastors were so used to Tongan cultural settings that they found it difficult to accept a new idea or way. Bill's hope was for all pastors who are appointed by the Tongan conference to be well-trained not only in the field of practice but spiritually also to serve in another context. Pastors need to be trained in practice from the heart, not from the head, and to live out the seven sacred teachings of love, respect, courage, humility, truth, honesty, and wisdom.

Bill acknowledged that when these pastors were called to serve overseas without any experience and familiarity with the new context and environment it became a problem with the Tongan youth. Bill believed that the problem is due to bad leadership and the misunderstanding of culture and context that they are called to serve. Wimberly acknowledged that people need to draw others into the richness of God's caring resources for healing. They all need to hear a story of a liberator to comfort them in times of their hunger for help. They need to provide them with love and care, and that is how they embody faithfulness and trustworthiness of their duty as messengers of God.

During the conversation, Bill pointed out the importance of increasing the requirement of pastors from a three-year certificate program of theological study to a bachelor's degree. The significance of this idea would equip pastors with the tools to provide relevant programs for the youth in different contexts.

Second Interview

Rev. Sekeni (1): Malo e lelei Lose (greeting in the Tongan language)

Mrs. Lose (1): Malo e lelei Tangata'eiki Faifekau (replying to the greeting in the Tongan language)

Rev. Sekeni (2): I am so thankful and grateful to be able to share and talk with you about your concerns.

Mrs. Lose (2): I am pleased that I have the courage to contact you, because I could not talk to my pastor about this. I do not think that my pastor will understand my situation because he is not Tongan (Tongan immigrant), and he is not familiar with our culture. This is why I decided to come to you for advice.

Rev. Sekeni (3): Lose, I am so grateful that you come; and I am willing to listen and talk with you about your concerns. So, what brought you here today Lose?

Mrs. Lose (3): Pastor I have been having this problem with my family. My two sons grew up listening to me and everything. I dressed them up in our Tongan dress code every Sunday up until they left for college. The two boys were born here in America, and I was trying so hard to teach them about our culture. (Lose was pausing for a moment, she was emotional)

Rev. Sekeni (4): (hand her the box of tissues) Lose, there is nothing wrong with teaching our culture to our children that is what we want for them to learn our culture.

Mrs. Lose (4): I understand that Pastor, but when they came home after the last summer break they did not want to come to church anymore, and they did not want to wear their ta'ovala (Tongan traditional church dress code) that I made for them. They told me that church is boring, but when I came home from church that Sunday, I found out they went to a different church.

Rev. Sekeni (5): Then what did you do when you found out?

Mrs. Lose (5): I waited for them to come home, and I began to talk with them. I told them that I am extremely disappointed with their actions.

Rev. Sekeni (6): What did they say to you when you told them that you were disappointed?

Mrs. Lose (6): They asked me, “Why are you disappointed? We did go to church.” I asked them why they didn't wear their ta’ovala and why they did not come to our church. Pastor, they told me that they went to the Disciples of Christ, because they understood their preaching and they did not have to wear a ta’ovala to that church. They do not want to practice our tradition and culture. They asked me, “Why do we have to wear the ta’ovala,” and “Every time we sit in the church, we do not even understand what the preacher is talking about. Mom, we have been sitting with our ta’ovala in that church for 19 years, because you told us to do so. We do not even know why we have to wear the ta’ovala to church or any of the Tongan occasions.”

Rev. Sekeni (7): What was your reaction to your two boys?

Mrs. Lose (7): (silence) Pastor, I realized that they are right. I have been wearing the ta’ovala to church for 58 years without knowing the value behind it, and why am I wearing it. I grew up seeing my parents wearing it to church and they made me wear it. Pastor, I realized that my two sons have been sitting inside the church all these years without receiving any of those messages preached. I understand that the Tongan immigrant wants everything to be done in the Tongan ways of how they did service back in Tonga. Pastor, I realized that my boys are Tongan Americans, who grew up here in America and it is quite a different context from Tonga.

Rev. Sekeni (8): Lose, believe me when I say that I feel your concern, because at my church most families have similar situations. The Tongan immigrants and the Tongan Americans always have these issues over culture.

Mrs. Lose (8): Pastor, what did you do to solve these problems at your church?

Rev. Sekeni (9): Lose, I understand this is an exceedingly difficult situation for all of us. When these problems occur at our church, I began to investigate the cause of the problem. What I found out is that the Tongan immigrants wanted everything in the church to be done in the Tongan customary ways. According to the youth at my church, they were telling me the same thing that you are explaining about your two sons. When the youth told me about these things, I immediately knew that this is a leadership problem. Leaders do not realize that the youth are growing up in a totally new culture and context. They want to identify themselves as Tongan, but they do not want to practice the culture. The reason for this is that they do not know the value behind them. What I did with my youth was, structuring a youth program every Friday night. The purpose was to educate them to understand the values behind our culture, the doctrine of the church and to do a Bible study in English about the scriptures for the coming Sunday. It was successful. The youth now understand the culture, doctrine and what is about to be preached on the next Sunday.

Mrs. Lose (9): Pastor, can I bring my two sons to your church's youth program when they come next time.

Rev. Sekeni (10): Sure, Sure: I will be glad to have them over and join our youth programs and it will be a pleasure to get to know them and talk with them.

Mrs. Lose (10): Thank you so much Pastor, thanks for your time, I will see you again.

Rev. Sekeni (11): Thank you, Lose, for coming, may God Bless you and your family. Goodbye.

Glossary of Tongan Terms

akonaki: meditation

anga faka'apa'apa: reverence and respect

anga' ofa: loving and compassionate nature, represented in the Golden Bands

apitanga: church youth retreat

fahu: father's oldest sister

faiva fakatonga (*faiva* for short): Tongan dance

fala: traditional leaf mats

fefine akonaki: respected women

feleoko: storage place

hou'eiki: chiefs

'inasi: share, first fruit offerings

'Inasi: Tongan festival week when people give their first fruits to the king

kafa: wrapping rope that consists of four smaller ropes (the Golden Bands)

kahoa lou'akau: leaf scarf worn by women

kahoa louifi: a combination of the kahoa kula and the kiekie

kahoa kula: red cotton scarf

katoanga polopolo ("occasion offering"): first fruit offerings voluntarily given

kava: an Australasian shrubby pepper and the name of the intoxicating drink made from its crushed roots

Kavei Koula: the Golden Bands, the four pillars of Tongan virtue

kele'a: seashell trumpet

kiekie lou'akau (*kiekie* for short): leaf waist wrapper worn by young women, kiekie for short

langi: sky/skies

lototo: ready and willing heart and mind

lotu: pray, prayer, religion, or religious

mamahi'i me'a: zeal and team spirit for any worthy cause

matāpule: the esquires or officers

moheofo: primary wife

mu'a: gentlemen

‘olovaha: the head of a circle, where the highest-ranking official sits; also, the person who sits at the head of the circle

polopolo: giving one's first fruits to the king

popula: captives or slaves

povai: war stick

sipi tau: war dance

tala: to tell, to inform, or to expose

talaloto: speak your heart

talanga: sharing and discussing a story in a group

talanoa: oral storytelling by one person

Tangaloa: name of traditional Tongan god, the god of the sky

ta'ovala: leaf skirt

tapa: a traditional cloth made from pounded bark or Tongan mats

Taufa Tahi: shark god

tauhi vaha'a: keeping good relations with one another

tu'a: commoners

tu'i: king

Tuku Fonua: the giving of the land and Tongans to God by Siaosi Tupou I

tulou: excuse me

tupenu: sarong

‘umu: underground oven

vala lou’akau: ta’ovala

yangona: kava

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